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The Path to Happiness

Sayalay Susilā



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Preface

This book is a compilation of five of my talks, given in various centers in the USA and Malaysia from 2010-2013. Of my many talks, I chose these because I think they are especially important for practitioners. For example, in the talk "The Key to Happiness," I stress self-restraint—not harming others based on the understanding of the law of karma—as one of the keys to happiness. Through many years of experience teaching in the U.S., I see this aspect of Dharma has been underappreciated.

I also include a talk on how to practice loving-kindness meditation in a systematic way, with the hope that by frequent practice, we can remove the hindrance of anger that robs us of our happiness. As loving-kindness



goes deep into the heart through repeated practice, we are transformed by its power, and subsequently are able to suffuse others with love, making this materialistic world a better place in which to live.

It was my delight to be able to include here my favorite sutta —"The Simile of the Vipers"— as it brings out many aspects of Dharma that are necessary for insight meditators to note. I hope my limited explanation helps to shine some light on this short but important sutta.

In "Understanding the Five Aggregates" I quote from many suttas and explore the subject at length, knowing how important it is to make the aggregates known in order to free oneself from suffering. As Buddha said: "Whatever in the world one might cling to, it is just materiality that one is clinging to; it is just feeling, just perception, just formations, and just consciousness that one is clinging to (SN22:79)." Clinging to the five aggregates is the cause of all suffering.

Lastly, I include a talk on "Contemplation of Mind," the third foundation of mindfulness from the sutta on the "Four Foundations of Mindfulness." It seems that this way of practice, though recommended by the Buddha as being very effective at helping depersonalize the many different states of mind, is not well propagated nowadays. I humbly offer you this alternative approach to watching your mind.

Now it is time for me to express my gratitude to those who have relentlessly offered their help—Kitty Johnson, Jen Shu, Teoh Boon Tat, Thong Yian Nee, Chan



Kah Poh, and Saw May Lee for transcribing my talks. Special thanks are due to my editors—Alaknanda Bagchi and Joanne Wagner. I thank also Tracy L Budd, Ben Zhang and Anna Fisher for the help they offered. Lastly, I would like to thank profusely my final editor, Maureen Bodenbach, for reading through the whole book and making necessary changes.

May all beings be well and happy. May they find the path to true happiness.

Sayalay Susīlā USA, April 2013



Words of Appreciation (1)

"It is through dealing with a person that his purity may be known, and then only after a long period, not a short period; by one who is attentive, not by one who is inattentive; by one who is discerning, not by one who is not discerning." -Thana Sutta (Traits) Anguttara Nikaya, Book of Fours:192

The most important trait of a meditation teacher, I believe, is the purity of motivation for teaching. For if the student does not have total trust in the teacher, true sharing of something as personal as meditation experiences and spiritual questions cannot occur. On this front, I would venture to say that it doesn't take a long period, nor someone who is very attentive or discerning, to conclude that Sayalay Susila teaches only for the benefits of others.



The purity of Sayalay Susila's motivation for teaching is exhibited in her personal conduct as a nun and in her openness in sharing Dhamma knowledge. She often practices eating one meal a day during retreats and daily living. During retreats, she not only encourages meditation sessions to start early in the morning but is often the first one to start sitting, well before the scheduled time. Other than to give instructions, she meditates herself during all full sitting sessions. I believe that people who have the opportunity to interact and observe her are fortunate to be able to peek into a true monastic living.

On teaching the Dhamma, she is a true follower of the Buddha, who taught with an 'open hand'. There is zero inclination of "hoarding" knowledge for present or future personal gain. She does not guard any piece of Dhamma knowledge or insight she possesses no matter how unique or special and shares them freely as fast as she thinks the audience can absorb. I've personally benefited and been inspired on many occasions through her unreserved sharing of her personal meditation and insight knowledge. Her website has many invaluable talks and articles for anyone with an open mind to learn.

Given the purity of her motivation for teaching the Dhamma, it is only natural that Sayalay Susila is an effective teacher. For concentration practices, she teaches Jhana practices through mindfulness-of-breathing, four elements, and 32 parts of the body. I'm often amazed at her answers to some very nuanced questions encountered by her students during these meditations. Insight meditation, I believe, is her specialty, especially in the contemplation of feelings and mental states at the moment of arising. For something as simple as anger, I used to not know that I am angry until I feel my body



temperature rising. Through some simple instructions from her, now I can observe the arising in the mind.

I feel enormously fortunate to have immediately gained total confidence in Sayalay Susila during my very first meditation retreat five years ago, and that confidence has since been verified in the many interactions I have with her as a student and a friend. I sincerely hope that many more people will have the same good fortune to get to know her and benefit from her Dhamma teaching.

Sincerely,

Your devoted student, USA

Words of Appreciation (II)

I first heard Sayalay Susila teach the Dhamma during a pilgrimage to the Buddhist holy places in India in 2000. Those talks were so powerful it felt as if we were back in the time of the Buddha and the Teachings were directly penetrating our hearts. In fact, whatever Dhamma Sayalay teaches, my heart immediately responds without hesitation or confusion. The heart knows it's the Truth, recognizes the Dhamma, and doubt vanishes. Once, while listening to her teach Abhidhamma, a wrong view I had long held suddenly revealed itself with utter clarity. All the suffering that had been arising from that view became so apparent, but once seen it no longer held its power and



it vanished.

From that, faith arose. Faith in the Dhamma. And faith in the ability of this teacher to bring the Dhamma to me in a way I would benefit from infinitely. This pattern repeats itself again and again. Each time Sayalay teaches I come face to face with a new understanding of the Dhamma that in some way directly changes my view, makes me realize my mistake, clears a path to better understand my own and others' suffering. Sayalay reveals the meaning behind each line of a Sutta or the most difficult Abhidhamma teachings so that what you think is impossible to penetrate suddenly reveals itself and shines into your heart. Understanding grows. Faith grows. Forgiveness grows. Happiness grows.

Without having met Sayalay, I feel my life would have become deeply unhappy, it would have been impossible to forgive my faults because there would be no way to see their causes and limit their effects. I feel that it's somehow my great fortune that Sayalay makes the deepest effort to teach and hasn't ever given up on her students, even one as infinitely frustrating as I must be! She has given me more than I can ever repay in this lifetime, and so I resolve always to practice what she teaches and make my life a blessing.

Sincerely,

Maureen Bodenbach, USA



Words of Appreciation (III)

Sayala Susila was my first monastic teacher, and since that experience I have never returned to lay teachers. She took my practice to a much deeper level in a short amount of time, even before the retreat! I began listening to on-line recordings of her USA retreats, found her words fascinating and exceedingly simple to follow. By the time I arrived for the retreat, several months later, I had already progressed by leaps and bounds. The in-person retreat again opened up new doors that I could not have imagined.

She was the first teacher I'd ever had (in 7 years of practice) who actually took a real interest in me, as a student and person, and in my personal practice and practice difficulties and accomplishments. That retreat was almost 3 years ago and I have continued to learn from her through her writings as well as on-line recordings and in-person retreat settings. She is my teacher. I will always think of her as my real and only teacher, even though I study with other monastics as well.

I believe that Sayalay Susila is a truly gifted teacher. Her knowledge is vast and her manner exudes confidence in her subject, which helped me find deep trust in her right away. She knows her subject. She cares deeply about her students. She is joyful and happy in imparting what she knows and in encouraging all to succeed. She is patient with everyone, sincerely wanting to be sure everyone understands what she is saying.



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I could write pages, but I will simply say that if you get the opportunity to study with her, do so. You won't regret it.

Sincerely,

Kitty Johnson, USA





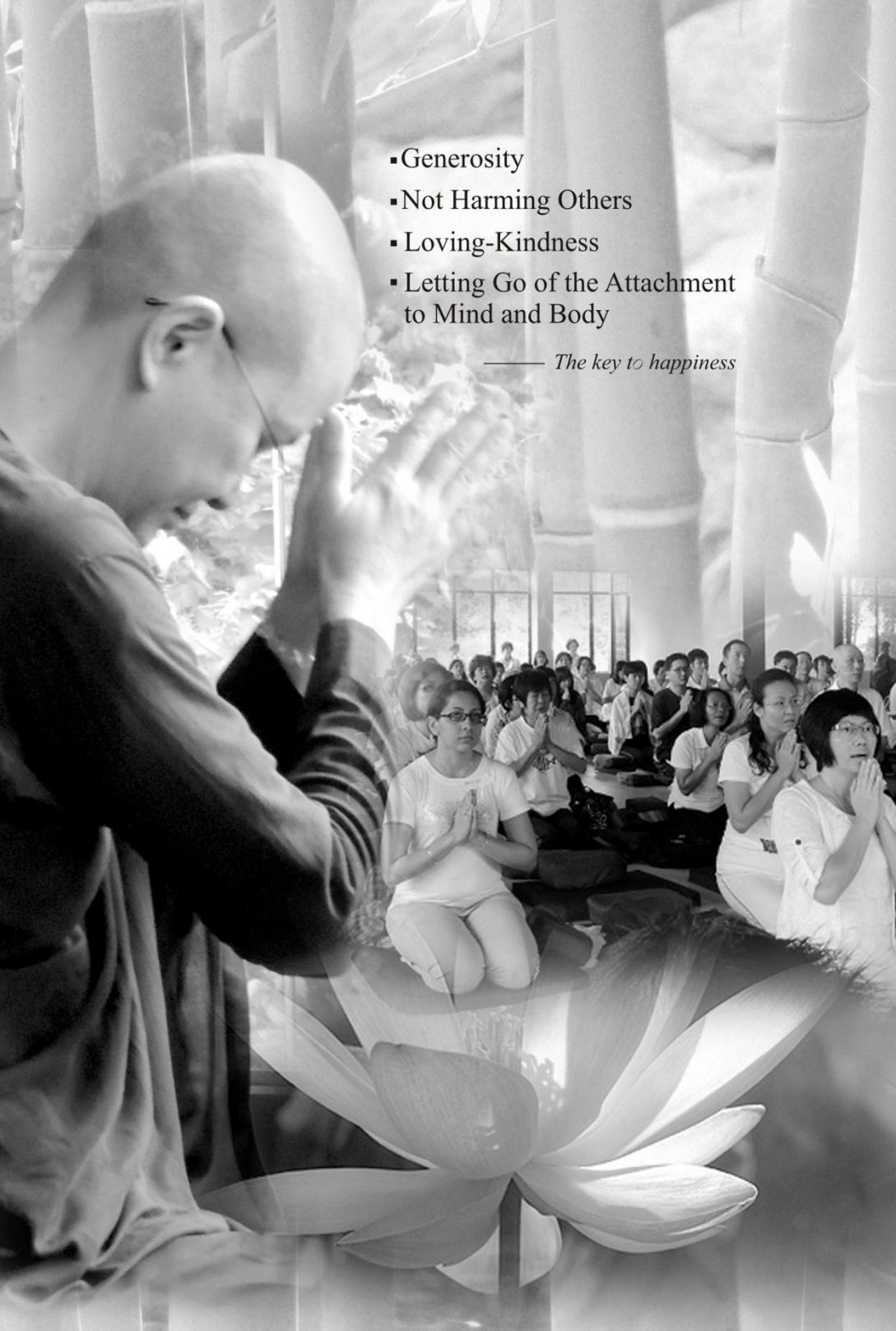
The Key To Happiness

Page 1 ~ 30



Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Samma-Sambuddhassa (x3)



- 
- Generosity
 - Not Harming Others
 - Loving-Kindness
 - Letting Go of the Attachment to Mind and Body

——— *The key to happiness*



*Better it is to live one day virtuous and meditative
than to live a hundred years immoral and uncontrolled.*

—Dhammapada 110 —

All beings love happiness, seek happiness and avoid suffering. Unfortunately, most beings think that that happiness comes from the external, from the pleasure of sights, sounds, smells, tastes, touch, and mental objects. Our eyes are constantly seeking pleasant, agreeable sights. We spend our time watching movies, looking at magazines, and going shopping. Men search for beautiful women; women beautify themselves to attract men. Our ears are constantly seeking sweet sounds music and praise. Our nose wants good and fragrant smells. Our tongue desires delicious and sweet tastes—the taste of food, alcohol, and drugs. We eat not to sustain the body, but to satiate our



craving. We overeat and then later try hard to lose weight. Many people crave for wine and liquor to the point of becoming alcoholics.

And our body longs for a soft touch—a soft bed, clothing, and of course the touch of a loved one. Our mind indulges in all types of fantasies—planning and expectations for the future, or sweet memories of our past.

Due to this wrong perception—that happiness can be gained through the enjoyment of these six external objects—beings do not look inward to the source of true happiness.

We think that these six external objects can provide us true happiness and satisfaction, and our actions follow from such thoughts accordingly. So with our body we seek all types of enjoyment through the six sense-objects, forgetting the danger in that enjoyment, forgetting that the more we enjoy sensual pleasures the more we get addicted. The pleasant feeling experienced from enjoying these objects gives rise to craving, and dependent on intense craving, clinging arises; we find ourselves clinging to these six external objects until we are unable to let go of them. We become enslaved, performing different types of bodily and verbal actions to satiate the craving. These bodily, verbal, and mental actions are, according to the teachings of the Buddha, karma. And the law of karma says that when there is an action, there is a reaction. When you throw a ball onto a wall the ball rebounds. It doesn't go to someone else, it bounces back to you directly.

These actions leave behind karmic energy, which is latent in the stream of our mind and body. When this



karmic energy meets with favorable conditions, the results appear. The “fruit” arises. Then we have to pay for the karma.

How do we become enslaved in sensual enjoyment? Let me give you an example: Sometimes we have sores on the limbs and they cause so much itchiness that we have to scratch them; but we also know the more we scratch, the worse the wounds will be. Yet we cannot control our mind not to scratch them. Why do we continue scratching them? This is because when we are scratching those sores or wounds we find a certain measure of satisfaction, almost enjoyment, even though it makes the wounds worse. But we do not care about the effect; what matters more is the satisfaction and pleasurable feelings that the scratching stimulates. It is the same with all sensual pleasures. The moment you enjoy a sensual pleasure, of course it gives you satisfaction and pleasant feelings; but the wounds and the injury it causes cannot be underestimated. The Buddha compares sensual pleasures to a man taking a blazing grass torch and running against the wind. As he runs against the wind, the fire of the torch invariably blows backward against the man. Only by letting go of that blazing torch will he escape from being burnt.

Of course, there is no wrongdoing if we enjoy what we get lawfully. But there must be a limit. Let's say there is a bottle of honey, and an ant likes sweet honey. The moment the ant sees the honey, it goes inside the bottle to taste it. If the ant just takes one sip to satisfy its thirst, it is fine. However, most ants are unable to be contented with a single sip; they will continue to sip the honey and



eventually they will drown in the honey and die. This is the danger inherent in sensual pleasures. Whenever craving for sensual pleasures increases, our body and mind become hot, agitated, and confused. We are tormented on the spot due to lust. There is no inner peace. It is important to understand that the enjoyment of the six external sense-objects can never bring us lasting happiness.

What, then, are the ways to true happiness? Happiness has many types or levels, from gross to subtle.

Sharing what we have with others.

This is called *dāna*, or charity, in the teachings of the Buddha. Whatever we have, be it money, knowledge, material things, sweet words, care and love, or inspiration, we share our possessions with others who may need these things. To us, offering others a meal may not be a significant act, but it could be very significant to a hungry person. When we see others using the things we have given to them, and we see they have benefited, that they become happy, we ourselves in turn become happy. I think most people practice this type of charity. This is one type of happiness.

By giving away some of our material things to others, we also find another type of happiness, which comes from:

Non-attachment to our own property.

We know that when life comes to an end, we have to leave everything behind—our big house, our car, our



money—we can't even bring one cent along. What then do we bring along when we pass away? Skillful and unskillful karma.

Most people die experiencing fear and bewilderment, unable to depart from the wealth they hold dear. Frequently practicing charity during one's life gives happiness and solace when reflecting on it during one's dying moment. Such generosity becomes the path leading to heaven. But if while alive we are unable to share a little of what we have with the needy, we accumulate the karma of stinginess rather than generosity, and this paves the way to an unhappy rebirth. Since we know we have to die eventually and leave behind all our property, why not practice non-attachment to our property while we are still alive by sharing what we have with others? By practicing generosity in the present, we not only make it a habitual karma but also experience happiness here and now.

So we gain two types of happiness by practicing generosity—*happiness gained through sharing with others and happiness gained through non-attachment to our own property*. These are the so-called “gross” forms of happiness.

A more subtle type of happiness develops from there:

Not harming others.

People harm each other through physical and verbal actions. A person brings physical harm to others through beating and killing them; we even kill animals for our enjoyment. Verbally, we harm others through telling lies,



speaking harshly, and spreading malicious gossip aimed at disrupting the harmony between two parties.

Not harming others is to be achieved by way of restraint. We restrain ourselves by following the five precepts, or five morality trainings:

1. Abstaining from killing
2. Abstaining from taking what has not been freely given by others
3. Abstaining from sexual misconduct
4. Abstaining from telling lies
5. Abstaining from taking intoxicants

Simply taking drugs is not necessarily unwholesome; but when people consume alcohol and drugs without limit, they lose clarity of mind—the mind becomes out of control. At that time a person can do anything and yet not be aware of the possible consequences. I have had devotees tell me, “When my husband is not taking any alcohol he is completely fine; he is a good person. But the moment he gets drunk, he starts to beat me up, scold me, and even beats my son and daughter. He becomes a madman.” So we avoid taking intoxicants because once one loses clarity of mind, one is capable of performing many unwholesome deeds, which will harm both others and oneself.

One's practice of self-restraint is based on two considerations: Compassion for others and an understanding of the law of karma. Out of compassion for others, we abstain from killing. All beings love their lives. For example, let's say one night as you are walking down a street, suddenly a robber appears with a knife, places it



against your neck and threatens to cut your throat. How would you feel? Scared! You would feel fear. Fear of what? Fear of being harmed, of being killed. Why are we afraid of being killed? It is because we love our lives. We want to live. All sentient beings, including animals, also love their lives. They also do not want to be killed. Thus, the Buddha said that those who love themselves should not harm others. So out of compassion for others, we abstain from unwholesome bodily conduct and unwholesome verbal conduct.

Understanding the law of karma is the second consideration. The law of karma says that good begets good, bad begets bad. When we harm others, the result of that unskillful karma will return to us eventually. When killing other beings, there is volition: the *intention* to make their lives short. As a result, our lives will become short. In this world you can see that some people live long, while others live for only a short time. Some die at the age of 15 or 20, and many die while still in the mother's womb. Why is this so? Everything that happens depends on causes and conditions. Nothing happens without a cause.

Those who die very early are experiencing the results of their previous karma of killing. By understanding the law of karma we abstain from killing because we love ourselves, and we want to live long in this world. In addition, by not harming others we ourselves are protected from and by the law of karma.

This protection is internal, not external. The Buddha once described the difference: When a king and his ministers go out, they are protected by many body guards.



But this protection is not real protection; it offers no guarantee. Haven't we seen many presidents of different countries shot dead? But if we practice self-restraint and do not harm others by bodily and verbal actions, we are protected internally by our wholesome karma and are safe even without all those bodyguards to protect us. Internal protection is much more important and lasting than being protected externally. Being protected by our virtue internally, wherever we go we become fearless. Fearlessness is very important, especially in the U.S.A. So many Americans have told me they have so much fear and worry—fear of being shot on the streets. How do we overcome all these fears? If one keeps one's morality pure—never harming others by body, speech, and thought—one will automatically become joyful and fearless. Wherever I go, I am not worried what will happen to me because I trust my own good karma to protect me. Even if I were to be harmed, I would think wisely: it is just the result of my past unwholesome karma. I am paying my debt—that's all!

This fearlessness is a kind of happiness. It makes the mind light, courageous, and free. However, if you have caused harm to others before, it is never too late to practice self-restraint now. Self-restraint gives internal protection and enables one to live without fear. This means possessing confidence in life even while facing danger and death. Life becomes happier and lighter. This is the second kind of happiness: the happiness that comes from inner confidence based on not harming anyone through verbal and physical actions.



Now we come to the third type of happiness. This is the happiness that comes from not harming others mentally. Physically and verbally we may not harm others, but sometimes mentally we may wish our enemies to be harmed. The moment this unskillful thought arises in our mind, the mind starts to lose its peace and happiness. How do we overcome this mental harm? We do this by cultivating loving-kindness, *mettā* meditation. *Mettā* is unconditional or universal love, a love without attachment—simply wanting others to be happy without any expectation.

In *mettā* meditation, we radiate thoughts of loving-kindness to others by sincerely wishing that they be well, happy, and peaceful; free from enmity and all other defilements. Thoughts of loving-kindness will produce many good vibrations or energy emanating from us that will have a positive effect on ourselves and others. *Mettā* enhances good health and good relationships with others, even with our enemies. However, radiating loving-kindness to our enemy is not an easy task. Therefore, we begin the practice by sending the *mettā* to ourselves first. Again, this may be very difficult for some Americans, as many of them have told me that they have self-hatred. In that case, a skillful means may be to start with your pets. Most Americans like pets. Some like their pets even more than they like most human beings. One day I asked an American woman who has many pets, “Why do you like pets so much?” She answered, “When I get angry with them at least they never argue back.”

So start with your pet, and if it is successful, then you can switch to radiating *mettā* to yourself:



“May I be well and happy; may I be loving.” Try to visualize the happy times you have had in your life. Think of your good qualities to arouse your joy. Or think how lucky you are, being able to practice the teachings of the Buddha.

Keep repeating these messages until your mind is peaceful and becomes happy.

Next, we radiate *mettā* to our respected teacher wholeheartedly until joy and happiness arise in our heart. Keep his or her smiling image in mind:

“May you be well and happy....” Feel your love enveloping him or her.

Then we proceed to a lovable friend, with the same wishes. It is not difficult to radiate love to our good friend, right? When the mind becomes light and joyful, move to a neutral person. To radiate love to a neutral person takes a little more effort and time. But when the mind is suffused with love for our respectable teacher and friend, with the power and momentum of that developed mind, sending love to a neutral person becomes easy. To each person we repeat the above phrases until the mind becomes happy.

Lastly, radiate *mettā* to your enemy. But do not begin with the enemy you hate the most! Although mentally you may say, “May my enemy be well and happy, may he or she be free from suffering,” if you are unable to forgive the hurt he or she has inflicted on you, you may end your meditation wanting to give him or her a punch! This is because we have not fully developed our minds yet.



First, choose someone you only slightly dislike. Once you succeed in sending loving-kindness to him or her, change to another person you dislike a little more, until you reach the enemy you hate the most. And if you do not have any enemies in this world, that is a blessing. You do not have to send your loving-kindness to an enemy. Although we may not hate anyone, somebody may not like us; so those who do not like us should be considered as our enemies. Radiate *mettā* to them. One day when you meet them, they may start to smile at you, greet you, or even send you a gift. At that time abundant happiness will arise in you. You will have softened the hatred. And don't think that this is a miracle. It does work very well. I would like to share with you my own experience.

Many years ago when I was in Malaysia, I was living with a fellow nun and a young lady. This young lady was behaving rudely toward us constantly without any apparent reason. And I was beginning to feel uncomfortable due to her behavior. One day I felt I should do something to improve the situation. Remembering the Buddha's words, "*Anger cannot be overcome by anger,*" I decided to radiate loving-kindness toward her.

Keeping her image clearly in mind, I repeatedly and sincerely sent her the following thoughts for half an hour: "May you be well and happy, free from all anger." Afterwards, I returned to my room. Before I stepped inside, the other nun told me that the young lady had prepared two gifts for us. Wow, what a surprise! It was truly beyond my expectations. She presented me with a gift by respectfully bowing three times. And from that day



forward she became much more cordial, and we lived in harmony until we departed. See? The power of *mettā*!

So this loving thought itself has great power. You must have faith in it. Try it out for yourself. If you have a lot of enemies you should try this even more. It will improve your personal relationships. If you try it on your boss, you may even get promoted! If you are the boss of a big company and you want to ensure productivity, try radiating *mettā* to all your staff. You may try it especially for those employees who never seem to listen to you!

Once we are skilled in *mettā* meditation, we can directly radiate *mettā* to those who hurt and abuse us, and by doing so fill ourselves with happiness. In this world, even if you were the Buddha, you cannot avoid people harassing you or abusing you. These are called the eight worldly conditions: suffering and happiness; fame and disrepute; gain and loss; praise and blame.

Through our mastery of loving-kindness meditation, we repay our enemy with patience and love, winning the battle that's hard to win. If we return an angry man's anger with our own anger, we are like someone trying to pick up a fire ball to hit another, but end up burning ourselves first. Instead, we should wish him to be well and happy, free from mental torture, free from anger. The person who utters abusive words and tries to hurt us is the one who loses. In order to utter abusive words to hurt somebody, one must generate anger first; without anger, one cannot utter harsh speech. So he is the victim of his own anger when he abuses us. Although apparently we are being abused, in actuality, he suffers the mental



torment first. If we do not react with anger, he is the loser. He loses happiness now and hereafter, according to the law of karma. Understanding this, we can shift our attention from radiating *mettā* to radiating compassion. When we are armed with compassion, our enemy may harm us physically or verbally, but never mentally. If none can harm us, this is a great blessing. Reflecting wisely in this way, we become even more fearless. Endowed with *mettā*, wherever we go, *people love us, because we love them*. One does not feel lonely anymore. This is the third type of happiness.

Now we come to the most subtle type of happiness, the most difficult to achieve. The former three types are considered easy in comparison. The last and true happiness comes from: *Letting go of the attachment to the body and mind*.

Everyone is attached to the body. Because of that, when the body feels sick or when any disease occurs, we feel depressed and become unhappy; that unhappiness and depression makes our health even worse. Have you ever investigated why we feel unhappy when the body is sick? The cause lies in the deep attachment we have to the body. For an *Arahant*, an enlightened being, who no longer feels any attachment to the body, whatever happens to his body, he only feels the pain physically but not mentally. Ordinary people feel pain physically as well as mentally when the body is sick. This is because we are attached to and identified with the body as “mine” and “myself.” This attachment and wrong identification comes from not seeing the body as it really is. The “body” is just a concept. The four elements that make up the body are ultimate



realities, and this is what we all must learn. This can be realized by practicing the *four-elements meditation*.

The four elements are: the earth element, the water element, the fire element, and the wind element.

The earth element is not referring to the earth itself; the characteristics that this element carries and bears are what categorize it as the earth element. The earth element has six characteristics: hardness, roughness, heaviness, softness, smoothness, and lightness. You can feel the earth element all over the body. For example, when you touch your bones or your head, you feel hardness. This hardness is the earth element. Sometimes you feel softness, this is also the earth element. Hardness and softness are relative.

The water element has the characteristic of flowing: our tears flow, as do saliva and blood. The water element also has the characteristic of cohesion, which makes the organs cohere together so that they do not scatter.

The fire element has the characteristic of heat and cold, which are also relative. When the element is hot, it has the characteristic of heat. When the element is less hot, it takes on the characteristic of cold. The heat that warms up the body, digestive heat, and the heat that causes our hair to turn grey are all categorized as the fire element. Those who have the fire element in excess, and give in to anger fast, age fast owing to the excessive heat they produce that burns the body.

What is the wind element? Our body can sit erect because of the supporting force within it; this supporting force is the wind element. Moreover, we can move our



limbs or move our hands, flex and stretch, because of the wind element. So anything that moves, vibrates, or pushes is also the characteristic of the wind element.

By investigating this body with wisdom from the top of the head down to the soles of the feet again and again, you will find only the characteristics of these four elements: hardness, roughness, flowing, cohesion, heat, cold, supporting, pushing, and so on. And if you keep on discerning these four elements, concentration will develop until eventually you see the body emitting light. By continuing to discern the four elements in the body, you will notice many billions of very tiny particles. These particles are always arising and passing away, in a state of flux. Some meditators see that the whole body is bubbling, even breaking up or falling apart. What is changing, breaking up and falling apart is not permanent; it is impermanent, transient, and fleeting. How can the body that is impermanent, changing, arising and passing away, and disintegrating ensure happiness? It cannot. One also cannot control the process of arising and passing away. One cannot say, “Arising, please stop! I only want ceasing!” You cannot stop the process of arising and ceasing. It follows its own nature. So if we cling, if we are attached to this body—which in the ultimate sense is only a heap of elements that are arising and passing away—then we are attached to something that is *dukkha*, because what is impermanent is *dukkha*, unsatisfactoriness. Understanding the true nature of this body allows us to let go of our attachment to it.

We have no choice but to let go. Since the body cannot be held on to, the mind naturally will let go of



clinging to it. Once detachment from the body develops, when the body changes, falls sick, grows old, and the hair turns grey or white, we do not feel depressed. We do not feel mental anguish. Whatever happens to our body, we remain equanimous. This is another type of happiness—the happiness that comes from non-attachment to the body.

Now we come to non-attachment to the mind. The mind can be divided into four aggregates:

1. Feeling Aggregate
2. Perception Aggregate
3. Formations Aggregate
4. Consciousness Aggregate

I. Feeling Aggregate

There are three types of feelings: pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral. We like pleasant feelings, dislike unpleasant feelings, and are ignorant of neutral feelings. We react in the same pattern throughout our lives. Feeling is just a mental factor, not a self. Feeling has the characteristic of experiencing the desirable and undesirable aspect of the object. When we enjoy a piece of chocolate, it is pleasant feeling that experiences the desirable taste of chocolate, not a self that experiences it. Where do these feelings come from? These feelings come from the six contacts. The six contacts are:

1. Eye contact: When the eye meets with a pleasant, agreeable visible form, pleasant feeling arises, and we start to cling to this feeling. We want it to continue and to increase. Dependent on that pleasant feeling, craving arises.



However, if the visible object is not agreeable, unpleasant feeling arises, and we want to push it away. This activates the latent defilement of anger. If the visible object is neutral to the eyes, neutral feeling will arise.

2. Ear contact: When somebody praises us, the sound is very pleasant to the ear. Because of that pleasant feeling, even in our dreams we smile. When we meet with that person, we look for more praise. So whenever there are pleasant feelings, the mind starts to crave, to grasp—this is the nature of the mind. This is why the Buddha states in the doctrine of Dependent Origination: "Dependent on feeling, craving arises."

3. Nose contact: Whenever the nose comes into contact with a fragrant smell, a pleasant feeling arises. The pleasant feeling makes both the mind and body comfortable.

4. Tongue contact: Whenever some delicious food touches the tongue, a pleasant feeling will arise. For example, when a piece of chocolate cake touches the tongue sensitivity—Oh, what a pleasant feeling! Because of that feeling, one stretches out one's hand—wanting one more piece of the cake. Stretching out the hand to get one more piece is a sign of craving; grasping the cake and not wanting to let it go is clinging.

5. Bodily contact: Whenever the body touches some soft or smooth material or is caressed by a loved one, a pleasant feeling is stimulated. The pleasantness spreads and flows over the whole body, making one exclaim: "My gosh! How joyful!"



6. Mental contact: Whenever the mind thinks of all the fantasies, daydreams and pleasant thoughts, pleasant feelings will arise out of the pleasant mind contact.

From the time we were born until now, we have experienced billions of pleasant feelings arising from these six contacts. Do any of the pleasant feelings you have experienced remain? Are they still here, or have they passed away? Not one of them has remained. This shows that all feelings are impermanent; we have just verified this for ourselves. And yet, whenever we encounter a pleasant feeling, we always hope it will stay forever. We always forget that it will also pass away, that it is transient.

On the other hand, when we encounter an unpleasant feeling we always hope the unpleasant feeling will quickly go away. “Quickly go away— don’t last!” So we are not accepting things as they really are; we are trying to control the whole process. We only want things our way, and our habitual pattern of reactions, grasping what we like and pushing away what we don’t like, reinforces the identity-view of a self that is in control. No matter how much we want our pleasant feelings to last forever and our unpleasant feelings to cease immediately, these feelings will never comply with our wishes. Feelings arise and pass away according to causes and conditions. Their occurrence is beyond our control, and when the cause for their cessation is present, then the feelings simply pass away. This understanding—that all feelings are not-self, not subject to ownership or control, and are transient like bubbles—helps us to let go of the attachment to pleasant feelings, and the aversion to unpleasant feelings. Just look



upon them as passing clouds in the sky. Not bothered by any feelings, you will then be truly happy.

II. Perception Aggregate

Now let us consider the Perception Aggregate and see how one can gain happiness by not clinging to it. Let us first study what is the meaning of perception. Perception has the characteristic of knowing the quality of an object, so that the perceived object can be recognized again. For example, when you first saw a bird flying, your perception recognized the bird by its two wings flying in the sky. Perception made a mark or a note: “A bird has two wings” and kept it in your memory. The next time your eyes saw a bird again, this perception immediately recognized it by way of its two wings and perceived that “this is a bird.” So perception has two functions: a) to perceive the specific characteristics of the object, and b) to recognize it again.

As long as our wisdom is not fully developed through meditation, our five senses always perceive what is seen, heard, smelled, tasted, and touched as permanent, happiness, and a self. When we were born, we started crying for food. The moment our mother’s milk came in contact with our tongue, very pleasant feelings arose. We started to make a mental note—food gives pleasant feelings—and our perception kept these experiences in our memory. Every time when we were fed, we felt good. When we were fed repeatedly, the same pleasant feelings repeatedly arose and they eventually got imprinted in the mind, giving rise to the perception that these pleasant feelings are permanent. Even now, most of us unceasingly



crave for food because we have learned over time to perceive that food gives us pleasant feelings and that these pleasant feelings are permanent.

In addition, when our eyes first saw our beloved parents, when our ears heard their sweet voices, when our bodies felt the lovely touch of our mothers, we perceived, “Oh very good, great!” The happiness that came from what was repeatedly seen, heard, smelled, tasted, and touched became perceived as permanent. Further, we also wrongly perceived that there was a self—a permanent self—that perceived these experiences. This is called *sañña vipallasa*—perverted perception—perception that is contrary to the truth. Once perceived wrongly, this perception becomes very deeply rooted in our mental stream.

This habitual perception based on a distorted view of permanence, happiness, and self is responsible for our frustrations when our life experience shows the opposite. The vicissitudes of life have taught us that many events are beyond our control; they happen as a result of causes and conditions. If we had not delusively perceived everything as permanent and happy, would we feel suffering when things change?

To perceive things as they really are, in accordance with the truth, makes the mind unshakable under all circumstances. What does it mean: things as they really are? All formations, everything in this world, are subject to change, alteration, and destruction. Everything is in a state of constant flux, characterized by repeated arising and passing away, and because of this we feel oppressed. This



oppression is suffering, or *dukkha*. *Dukkha* is inherent in all changing things. Therefore, correcting our distorted perception—that everything lasts, contains happiness and is identified as a “self”—is the key to happiness. How do we correct this perception? By constantly contemplating impermanence until we successfully see that everything changes, is inherently unsatisfactory, and is beyond the control of a “self.” With corrected perception, the mind is steadfast.

III. Formations Aggregate

A formation is the construction of a condition. The function of a formation is to accumulate karma. Its characteristic is in forming, in adding all mental factors together. The formations aggregate includes lust, anger, jealousy, avarice, fear, remorse, worry, faith, joy, compassion, mindfulness, wisdom, concentration, and so on. They are *merely mental states* arising due to causes, performing their functions, then immediately passing away.

For example, at the present moment you are reading my words joyfully, as reading the Dharma is delightful. The mental factor of joy at this moment is performing its function of permeating you with lightness of the body and mind, which is its purpose. This joy should not be regarded as “I” or as “myself.” If I now change my tone and words to speak to you harshly, to scold you without any reason, the causes for the arising of joy will come to cessation. In their place, anger that is dormant in the mental stream may come to the surface instead, because the conditions for its arising are ready. Thus, when the



conditions for joy or anger to arise come into being, then joy or anger, as the case may be, will simply arise. All mental formations are governed by causality. To *see things in accordance with causality without any controlling entity is the key to happiness.*

IV. Consciousness Aggregate

The Consciousness Aggregate has the single characteristic of awareness of an object. There are six classes of consciousness:

1. Eye-consciousness seeing a form
2. Ear-consciousness hearing a sound
3. Nose-consciousness smelling a smell
4. Tongue-consciousness tasting a taste
5. Body-consciousness sensing a tangible object
6. Mind-consciousness being aware of a mental object

In the blink of an eye, millions of consciousnesses arise and vanish at tremendous speed. Owing to this incredibly rapid succession, the rise and fall of consciousness is hardly distinguishable and thus it appears to be continuous. This apparent continuity implies a perpetual awareness rather than what is really happening: discrete, rapidly succeeding mind-moments operating in a fixed, ordered process that is giving rise to awareness.

A simile may make this clearer. When we are watching television and at the same time eating chips and smelling their fragrance, it seems as if seeing, tasting, smelling, and listening are all happening simultaneously.



We cannot distinguish that eye-consciousness only sees, ear-consciousness only hears, nose-consciousness only smells and tongue-consciousness only tastes. Each consciousness in fact performs its own function at different times but in rapid succession. Not knowing what is actually happening, we wrongly think it is the same “I” who sees, tastes, smells, and hears simultaneously. Thus, the Buddha likens consciousness to a magician, making what is unreal seem real to deceive us.

These five aggregates—body, feeling, perception, formations, and consciousness—comprise the “self,” and craving and attachment arise dependent upon them. When there is attachment, there is suffering.

How can we practice to free ourselves from attachment to this body and mind, from the five aggregates? *Mindfulness and Wisdom are the key.*

Mindfulness comes face to face with the object in focus and does not forget it. Mindfulness is free from judgment, bias, prejudice and preference. Instead, mindfulness simply observes, recognizes, allows, and accepts any phenomena arising in the present moment for what they really are, neither embellishing them nor detracting from them.

There are two factors in mindfulness: recognition and acceptance.

For example, when anger has arisen in your mind, you may recognize, “There is anger in my mind.” Accept it. Accept the anger as it is. Do not try to push away what is unpleasant and cling to what is pleasant. Reacting in such



a way does not free us from suffering. Accepting the anger as it really is allows the wisdom to see the impermanence of anger.

Wisdom means to see things as they really are, in accordance with the truth, as impermanent, suffering, and not a self.

Wisdom requires several actions. First, not to self-identify: when any phenomenon arises from the mind and body—for example, an unpleasant bodily feeling—we must not identify with this unpleasant feeling as “I,” thinking, “*I’m uncomfortable. My pain.*” Instead we must dis-identify from the feeling by mentally noting, “This unpleasant feeling is *not ‘I,’ not ‘mine,’ not ‘myself.’*”

An unpleasant feeling, in and of itself, is unbearable, and gives rise to pain. If one does not dis-identify with the feeling, the mind will immediately identify it as “I”: This self-identification intensifies the pain, and as a result one suffers even more. This suffering due to bodily pain is called *dukkha-dukkha*.

On the other hand, if you self-identify with pleasant feelings as “I,” you also suffer, but this time you suffer from craving! When there is craving, both the mind and body are tormented. When the pleasant feeling disappears, as it must, you suffer again from the change and the loss of the pleasant feeling. This is suffering due to change—*viparinama-dukkha*. So to free oneself from different types of suffering, one does not self-identify with whatever phenomenon has arisen.



The next step in developing wisdom is to investigate.

Investigation of cause and effect is very important in the teaching of the Buddha. It constitutes the mental factor of wisdom.

Using the above example, if a feeling is not “I,” not “mine,” and not “myself,” what then is this feeling?

You investigate the characteristic and function of the feeling: its characteristic is to be felt and its function is to experience the desirable and undesirable aspects of the object. For example, when a man sees a charming girl, her image has all the desirable attributes to arouse a pleasant feeling in him. A man just feels it as pleasant feeling. If he further investigates the cause of his pleasant feeling, he realizes it is owing to pleasant eye contact. Pleasant eye contact is the cause, pleasant feeling the effect.

When the sweetness of chocolate impinges the tongue sensitivity, pleasant feelings arise. Before the chocolate cake touches the tongue, no pleasant feelings arise. Only at the moment of contact do pleasant feelings arise. But if an extremely bitter taste impinges the tongue-sensitivity, unpleasant feelings may arise. You then understand: “Oh, feeling is just an effect of the cause, which is contact.” After investigating in this way—how the contact of different sense objects on their corresponding sense-bases gives rise to different types of feelings—you will come to realize that each different feeling arises dependent on the type of contact, either pleasant or unpleasant, and you know with certainty for yourself that:



"This feeling is an effect of a cause (contact). The whole process is merely cause and effect."

This is why feeling is not defined as "I," "mine," or "myself." If feeling were "I," then whenever that feeling perishes, the "I" would have also perished. However, through your own experiences you see that though many different types of feelings have passed away, the so-called "I" still remains. Thus it does not seem fit to assume that the feelings were "I." The non-self nature of the phenomenon is revealed through the investigation of cause and effect. As the cause—contact—keeps changing, then the effect—feeling—keeps changing as well. Whatever keeps changing is impermanent.

This brings us to the next step in the process of developing wisdom: *contemplating impermanence*.

Mentally, you should mark each phenomenon that arises as impermanent, noting: "Impermanent... impermanent... impermanent."

We note impermanence for four reasons:

1. To undo our distorted perception of permanence that blocks us from seeing things as they really are.
2. To synchronize or harmonize the mind with the way things are. Everything in the universe is continually changing. By synchronizing our mind with it, this universal truth of change will manifest itself very fast.
3. To sever the craving. Thinking of the six sense-objects, six sense-bases, six contacts, and six



feelings as permanent and happiness nurtures craving. By nurturing craving, one cannot be free from suffering.

4. To teach the mind to let go. Since we cannot hold on to any phenomenon, the wisest way to deal with it is to let go of our attachment to it. When consciousness does not cling to pleasant feeling, for instance, then when this pleasant feeling passes away, you will not feel pain or stress because you already know it is impermanent. You are able to remain equanimous. *This equanimity is a great type of happiness.*

If you can practice in this way, you will find that your happiness will *increase* gradually, day by day, because your knowing mind is now in accord with the truth of *anicca*, or impermanence. Seeing clearly, you are able to let go of the clinging to the five aggregates. The Buddha said: "*The five aggregates of clinging are the Noble Truth of Suffering.*" This truth must be thoroughly understood. The five aggregates are the same as the mind and body, and we cling to them in two ways: by way of *wrong view* and *craving*. With wrong view we identify with these five aggregates as "I" and as "myself," thus giving rise to strong craving and to clinging. As the Buddha said, the cause for our suffering, or the Noble Truth of the Origin of Suffering, is craving. So in order to free ourselves from suffering we have to let go of the cause, which is craving.

As you become familiar with contemplating each experience as "impermanent... impermanent," with the maturing of one's wisdom there comes a day when one



actually sees the constant arising and passing away of all phenomena. Then the knowledge arises that what is constantly changing cannot bring happiness; it is only *dukkha*, or dissatisfaction. The Buddha said: "*Whatever is anicca (impermanent) or dukkha (suffering), should not be regarded as atta (self)*"; since no controlling entity can be found, it is *anatta*, not a self.

When your concentration, mindfulness, and wisdom become more mature, then no matter what arises in your mind and body, wisdom sees it only as the arising of suffering, and whatever ceases is just the cessation of suffering. One remembers what the Buddha said:

*"All formations are transient.
Having arisen, they cease.
Their cessation is bliss. "*

Having repeatedly seen *anicca*, *dukkha*, and *anatta*, the mind becomes disenchanted with the five aggregates. Being disenchanted, one feels dispassionate and is willing to let go of craving. When the mind no longer clings to anything whatsoever, this experience is called *freedom of the heart*. This can be achieved if one applies mindfulness and wisdom from moment to moment. *This freedom of the heart is the true happiness that we can experience in our daily life.*

Whatever arises in this mind and body—pain, happiness, sorrow, like and dislike—is, in fact, giving us a chance to experience the truth of impermanence. Take mindfulness and wisdom as your refuge to free yourself from all types of entanglement and suffering. This is the true happiness.



Loving Kindness Meditation

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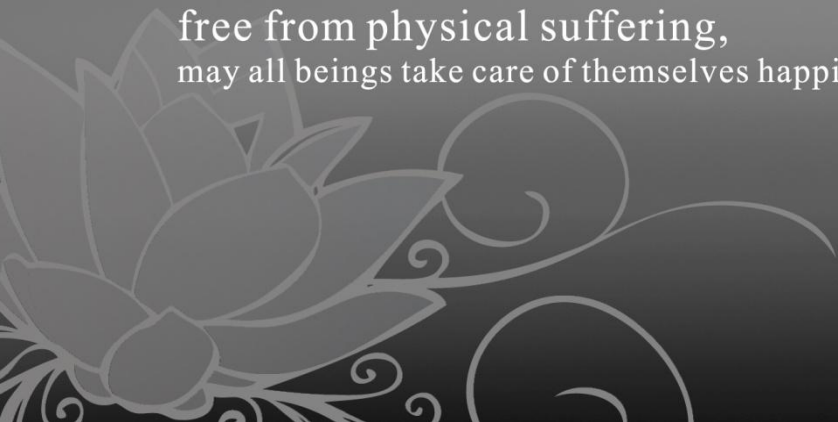


Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Samma-Sambuddhassa (x3)





May all beings be free from enmity and danger,
free from mental suffering,
free from physical suffering,
may all beings take care of themselves happily.





*Hatred is never appeased by hatred in this world.
By non-hatred alone is hatred appeased.
This is an eternal law.
—Dhammapada 5—*

1. What Is Loving-Kindness

In Pāli, loving-kindness is called *mettā*, which means gentleness, like a full moon. *Mettā* also conveys friendliness, but mostly we think of *mettā* as unconditional and universal love—pure love, without expectation from the other party, love that makes no distinction between living beings. *Mettā* is goodwill, a way of wishing others to be well and happy. With the practice of *mettā* meditation, we develop a genuine wish for our own happiness as well as the happiness of others. When we develop *mettā* for all beings by wishing them



good health and happiness, we are the first to reap the benefits, as we become happy and peaceful ourselves.

Mettā may be appreciated by any person under any circumstance of life, although for many of us it may be particularly useful when we must spend time with an angry person. If we live or work with an ill-tempered person, someone who is consumed with angry thoughts and violent acts, our heart burns with fear. We are always worried, gripped by anxiety. At such times, if we return *mettā* to the angry person, we can come to know and clearly understand the serene and peaceful quality that settles upon not only our own life, but on the life of the angry person as well. As we radiate thoughts of *mettā*, anxiety subsides and peace develops within our heart. We begin to fully understand *mettā's* true value. The recipient, too, experiences the peace of mind, although they may not understand why! Their anger will be eased and they will be more pleasant to be around. When we live or work in the shade of a person who has the quality of *mettā*, we feel serene and peaceful. *Mettā* is an expression of pure love. We sincerely wish others to be “well and happy; free from all danger, diseases, and calamities; and free from all mental and physical suffering.” We give warm wishes unconditionally and genuinely. There is never a wish for anything that is not beneficial. Most of us find it easy to wish that our good friends will be well and happy, but it is often very difficult to wish that same happiness and well-being to those we don't like, or to our enemies. This approach to loving-kindness is called “tainted” love, since our likes and dislikes are based on our preferences. It is grounded in an ego-centered attitude. If our “good friends” turn out to be harmful to us, our so-called *mettā* toward



them immediately shrinks like a feather thrown into the fire. True *mettā* makes no distinction between any living beings. It is like the love of a mother toward her only child, radiated into the world and offered to all living beings unsparingly.

Mettā is like soothing essential oil; it is always cool, joyful, and filled with delight. When we meditate on loving-kindness, the heart feels cool and happy and never burns with fear or anxiety. *Mettā* is always forgiving. No matter how much wrong a person has done to you, you will always forgive them because your love is unconditional. This kind of love will never turn to disappointment or hatred. It is concerned only with helping and is completely free from any destructive impulse. You work for the benefit of others and when others are benefited, you yourself become happy.

Mettā has the spirit of accepting others as they are. You do not have the desire to control or change another. Trying to exercise the power of control is a sign of an ego-centered attitude, or tainted love. You simply let others be themselves and wish them happiness. The spirit of *mettā* is free from entanglements and judgment. It is total acceptance.

As we develop and strengthen the quality of *mettā* in our hearts and minds by wishing all beings good health and happiness, there is no more desire to hurt other living beings. This is called *mano-kamma mettā* or *mettā* in mental actions. Since speech and action follow the command of the mind, when our mind is filled with *mettā* we will not utter any harsh or hurtful words to cause



harm or suffering to other living beings. Instead we speak lovingly and beneficially toward all living beings. This is called *vaci-kamma mettā* or *mettā* in verbal actions. In the same way, our bodily actions also will become benevolent by rendering help rather than causing bodily harm to other living beings. This is known as *kaya-kamma mettā* or *mettā* in bodily actions. Thus, having *mettā* for others mentally, or in other words not having even a single thought to hurt other people, we fulfill the practice of morality. When we practice in this way, other living beings do not suffer because of us. They feel safe with us. So *mettā* is the proximate cause for morality and it is an active aspect, whereas perfection of morality is the effect, which is passive. A heart bereft of *mettā* is often led astray to thoughts of harming others, either through killing, stealing, sexual abuse, or deceit. The world will fall into turmoil without *mettā*.

2. The Power of Loving-Kindness

Loving-kindness as a positive thought can bring about a positive result in oneself as well as in the recipients of *mettā*. Many scientific experiments in Western countries have proven the efficacy of loving-kindness and positive thoughts.

One such brain science study showed quite clearly that a good mental state brings about positive change in the brain. Whenever one has a wholesome thought such as compassion, patience, or wisdom, that thought can change the neural system in the brain and give positive energy to your brain. This ensures your mental health. A few recent psychological studies discovered that loving-kindness



meditation impacts health and well-being. One study done at Stanford University suggested that a short, seven minute practice of loving-kindness meditation can increase social connectedness. Loving-kindness meditation has also been shown to reduce pain and anger in people with chronic lower back pain. Researcher Barbara Fredrickson at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill found that loving-kindness meditation can help boost positive emotions and well-being in life, fostering the personal resources that come from experiencing positive emotion.

Richard J. Davidson, neuro-psychologist at the University of Wisconsin, performed an EEG study of people who practice *mettā* meditation, with a minimum of 10,000 hours of practice. His study showed substantial differences in the magnitude of gamma waves as well as gamma synchronization, particularly during meditative sessions and immediately afterward. During baseline states, where the subject was not doing *mettā*, there was a signature brain-wave pattern that distinguishes the *mettā* practitioners, lay people as well as monks, from people who, at baseline, had not extensively practiced loving-kindness meditation. This study also showed that during meditation there was an increase in the activity of brain areas such as the temporoparietal junction, insula, and amygdala, and an increase in the subject's ability to see things from another's perspective. These studies show that the amygdala is modulated during loving-kindness meditation. Loving-kindness meditation has also been shown to lower the participant's reaction to inflammation and distress, both of which are associated with "major depression, heart disease, and diabetes," in response to



stressors. This change was dependent on the amount of time spent practicing, with practitioners who spent more time meditating having correspondingly more significant changes in their brains.

Loving-kindness is like a healing balm. It can heal your body and mind and also impact the happiness of others. When we radiate loving-kindness to a particular person, that person will respond well toward our loving thoughts. In this way we indirectly help to support and uplift that person's mental health as well as their physical health.

Loving thought produces good mental vibration, and vibrations can travel far. Nowadays, we have good evidence of distance healing through Qi. For example, a *qi gong* master in America can heal a patient far away and reach beyond the boundaries of countries. This distance healing results from healing energy that travels far. The mental energy that arises through loving-kindness meditation can also travel far and reach the objects no matter where the person is.

In *Abhidhamma* teachings, it is stated that any mind state can produce four elements in the body. Among the four elements of earth, water, fire, and wind, the fire element can generate and reproduce another generation of the four elements. The four elements, together with color, smell, taste, and nutritive essence, arise in a group called *kalapa*, or particles. So, the fire element that is the product of a loving mind has the potential to produce another generation of *kalapa* inside or outside of the body. These are manifested as good vibrations or energy



emanating from us that have a positive effect on ourselves and others. How far the fire element can generate or reproduce another generation outside the body depends on the power of the person's thought. If his or her loving-kindness is very powerful, the force is also very strong and can bring positive results in another person.

Devadatta attempted to kill the Buddha by getting a wild elephant, Nalagiri, drunk and sending him toward the Buddha when the Buddha and a group of his disciples were on alms round. Ananda, out of his love for the Buddha, stepped in front of the elephant to protect the Buddha, but the Buddha told him not to worry because it wasn't possible for him to be harmed. Instead the Buddha radiated loving-kindness toward the elephant, and as Nalagiri approached, his madness was cured. Instead of harming the Buddha, he knelt down as if bowing to him.

Here, I would like to relate my own personal experience. On one occasion, while living in the forest, I awoke in the middle of the night, having been bitten by many small black ants. When I got up, the ants were crawling all over my body. Although they were small in size, the bite of these ants is extremely painful. While it is their nature to bite, it is not my nature to take revenge, even if they attack me, so I tried to pick the ants off my body gently without causing any injury to them. The more I tried, however, the more they seemed to hold on. My skin was starting to become inflamed, and, not knowing what else to do, I decided that the best way to deal with them was to radiate loving-kindness toward them. I sat down, forgetting the pain the black ants were inflicting on me, and instead I generated love for them. Joyfully, I



repeatedly wished them to be well and happy, with the mind only absorbed in the thought of goodwill for them.

To my astonishment, after a short time most of the ants had stopped biting me. Evidently, my thoughts of love had a soothing effect on their normally aggressive behavior. One or two ants, who must have been slow-receivers, continued to bite me. However, as my mind was absorbed in love for them, I just felt the bite but not the pain. Finally, the ants completely stopped biting me. My goodwill for them had transformed their aggressiveness into friendliness. After this incident, the ants became my friends. They continued to move around the room but never again on my body. We shared the space in harmony. I thanked them for revealing to me the power of *mettā*.

This wonderful experience left a strong impression on my heart: when I do not dwell on my own suffering, and instead am filled with love for another, particularly those who have harmed me, *bodily pain becomes imperceptible*. Before I decided to radiate *mettā* to all these tiny black ants, my mind was slightly annoyed by the pain they inflicted on me. In the course of radiating *mettā*, the pain became much more bearable, even to the extent that the pain became imperceptible! Thus, enduring the pain inflicted on us from others without the slightest anger is not magic! This experience also shows that *the thought of mettā has healing power*. It heals both sides. Armed with *mettā* for others and forgetting the thought of oneself being harmed, the mind becomes serene, unperturbed, and courageous. It is amazing how fearless the mind could become when one forgets one's "self." It is not a mystery, then, how the Bodhisatta (Buddha-to-be)



could endure the pain of being cut limb by limb in his long saṃsāric journey to Buddhahood, and still remain infused with love for his torturer. *The power of the selfless mind is inexhaustible.* And it lies within each of us. It is only a matter of changing our mind to make this power our own.

With *mettā* embedded in our heart, we can easily transform our mind when encountering adversity in life. When there is loss, either of one's property or loved ones, unskillful habitual reaction shapes our character. If we habitually react to our suffering by blaming others, the fire of delusion and hatred continues to spread and burn on both sides, to the point where it becomes obsessive and difficult to correct. The wise person sees that suffering and happiness do not come from without, but from within the mind—a mind of love—that claims nothing as its own.

Asian Buddhists know the power of *mettā*, so they often ask for blessings from virtuous monks, and keep the monks busy! Knowing the power of positive thoughts in oneself as well as in others, one's emotions become more manageable. However, many people lack inner confidence, thus lessening or depreciating the power to heal. Generating loving-kindness without being confident in the power of loving-kindness itself makes the loving-kindness "toothless" or without power. In *mettā* meditation, a high level of confidence is very important.

3. The Enemy of Loving-Kindness

Buddha urged us to develop loving-kindness so that we can remove our inner enemy of hate. Hate robs us of our happiness. However hate is not the sole enemy of



loving-kindness meditation. Loving-kindness has two types of enemies: a near enemy and a far enemy.

The near enemy of loving-kindness is affection or attachment. This attachment, which can be disguised as *mettā*, is the near enemy because attachment can easily creep into the heart of loving-kindness without our knowledge. The heart may suddenly fill with desire and burn with affection or lust. Affection is a very good actor; it disguises itself, so we might think it is *mettā*. From affection come fear and grief, but not from *mettā*. If attachment and affection enter the picture, the mind becomes domineering and develops possessiveness, which no longer resembles the spirit of *mettā*.

While radiating loving-kindness, from time to time we must check our mind and ask: Is our *mettā* associated with attachment or not? Is our *mettā* unconditional or not? Since attachment easily creeps in, when taking up this meditation subject we do not first send loving-kindness to our dearest one, such as our spouse or beloved son or daughter. Radiating *mettā* to the dearest person directly may cause attachment to creep into one's heart without one being aware of it. In a commentary to the Pāli texts, there is the story of a man who, while taking up this meditation for the first time from a senior monk, radiated *mettā* to his wife first; by the time he finished his meditation, lust had arisen in him and he ended up wanting to make love with his wife!

The far enemy of *mettā* is *dosa* or ill-will. When the mind is obsessed by hatred, one will find it difficult to radiate loving-kindness to anyone, even to oneself. *Mettā*



is serene, peaceful, gentle, and forgiving. On the other hand *dosa*, or anger and ill-will, is burning, harsh, confrontational, and unforgiving. There is a desire to destroy. Whenever there is hatred in the mind, *mettā* ceases to exist. Hatred opposes love. Those who have an angry temperament will find it very difficult to radiate loving-kindness to anyone. It is precisely for this reason that the Buddha recommends loving-kindness meditation as a cure. To carry out this practice, such individuals require skillful training.

4. Prerequisites of Loving-Kindness

As mentioned in the *Mettā Sutta*, to cultivate *mettā*, one must be endowed with the good qualities of being upright, very upright, compliant, gentle, pliant, and contented, and one must not be conceited nor impolite. For those who are endowed with all these good qualities, the practice of *mettā* becomes easy.

5. The Methods of Practicing Loving-Kindness

There are two ways to practice loving-kindness:

I. Developing *mettā* without *jhāna*

II. Developing *mettā* for the attainment of *jhāna*

I. Developing *Mettā* Without *Jhāna*

If a person intends to develop loving-kindness without *jhāna*, he or she may think of every being together as "all beings" and wish "May all beings be well and



happy" repeatedly. This can be done at any moment, whether one is walking or doing chores. "All beings" includes human beings, heavenly beings, hungry ghosts, animals, birds, fish and beings in the hell realm. To really have *mettā* for all beings, we must bear in mind that throughout this beginningless cycle of rebirths, we have all been connected. It is impossible to find one who has not been our relative, regardless of race, caste, color, gender, sexual orientation, or even other species besides humans. We ourselves have been one of those beings, and will be one of those beings in the future if the productive karmas are not exhausted. Owing to the confusion that descends on our minds between births, we become forgetful of our situation. Our limited vision (through lack of concentration and insight) obstructs us from seeing, and even from accepting the cycle of rebirths which have been revealed by those who have omniscient knowledge (or even simply through hypnotherapy).

Based on the understanding that we are all connected, we let the love flow from the heart. "May I be well and happy. May all beings who have been my relatives before also be well and happy." However much you wish for yourself to be happy, that much you should wish for all beings.

Beginners may find this difficult at first, because their concentration is still weak and lacks proficiency. Therefore, it is important to keep the phrase short. With more experience, one may add the following sentences:

1. *Sabbe satta averā hontu*—"May all beings be free from all enmity and danger."



2. *Abyiipajjhā hontu*—"May all beings be free from all mental suffering."
3. *Anīgha hontu*—"May all beings be free from physical suffering."
4. *Sukhi-attanam pariharantu*—"May all beings take care of themselves happily."

When we mentally or verbally say "all beings," we should incline our mind toward all beings. It is not essential that a picture of all beings arises in the mind; it only matters that we incline our mind toward all beings. If we try to get a mental picture, the mind may become tired. At the beginning, when concentration is still very weak, we may find that *mettā* completely disappears if we think too strongly of a mental picture. When reciting, "May all beings be well and happy," we need to make sure that our wish for their good health, happiness, and peace is genuine and strong. We cultivate the same love for others as we have for ourselves. A person who is practicing *mettā* should regard all beings in the same way as would a mother who cares for her only child.

"May all beings be happy and peaceful" implies that we wish all living beings to be free from mental suffering such as worry, grief, anger, depression, anxiety, longing, etc. We have to repeat the phrases over and over again. Take care not to let the reciting become monotonous. Feel the love emanating from your heart while reciting the phrases. If the mind gets tired through repeating the phrase, drop the words and let the mind feel the love. If sleepiness creeps in or the mind fills with worry, anxiety, or restlessness, we must increase our effort by repeating the phrases aloud; then *mettā* will be able to overpower



unwholesome mental states, and our practice will proceed much better.

II. Developing *Mettā* for the Attainment of *Jhāna*

In order to achieve *jhāna* (deep concentration) through loving-kindness meditation, one has to practice systematically. How does one do this?

First, radiate loving-kindness to yourself for 20 to 30 minutes. Although radiating loving-kindness to oneself does not result in the attainment of *jhāna*, why should we start with ourselves? This is because we must be happy first, only then can we have genuine love for others. Imagine a gloomy person; can he or she have love in the heart? He or she cannot even love himself or herself! *A happy person thinks positively and only sees the lovable side of others.* Therefore, it is essential to radiate *mettā* to ourselves first until the mind becomes very happy and calm; only then will we understand how valuable the happiness is for oneself. We start by scanning the body with love from head to toe. Generate love for every part of the body with the words "may the body be healthy and well." Do it slowly, and enjoy it. Make your heart as soft as possible, only then will the love flow.

When you have done this a few times, then gently shift your attention to your heart area, and mentally wish, "May the heart be peaceful and loving." Visualize yourself lying in the arms of a loving mother: the heart is fully content, free from all worries and anxieties. Gradually you



feel your heart abiding in a state of peace and contentment.

However, if we are the only person in the world who is happy, and the rest are all unhappy, we cannot be truly happy. For us to be happy, everyone must be happy. Therefore, we must extend our love to others, wishing them to be happy like us. To make *mettā* arise more easily in the heart, one must first think of *a respected person of the same gender who is still living*, and extend one's love to that person. It can be our teacher or a lovable friend, but it must be someone who is not too intimate. His or her virtue should generate your confidence. Calling all his or her virtues to mind, from the very bottom of the heart, one wishes: "May he or she be well, happy, and peaceful." You also can remember all the good deeds she or he has done. Having gratitude softens the heart and makes it easy to feel love for him or her.

Traditionally we use four phrases when practicing *mettā*, as follows:

1. *Sabbe satta averā hontu*—"May all beings be free from all enmity and danger."
2. *Abyiipajjhā hontu*—"May all beings be free from all mental suffering."
3. *Anīgha hontu*—"May all beings be free from physical suffering."
4. *Sukhi-attanam pariharantu*—"May all beings take care of themselves happily."

For beginners, choosing one phrase of the four is enough. Or, if you prefer, you can choose any other phrase that you feel most suits the respected person. For



example, “May you be happy and peaceful.” So, think of one respected person, and radiate loving-kindness to him or her constantly by repeating the phrase up to a hundred or a thousand times. However, saying the words without genuine love is futile. While wishing, “May you be well and happy,” we do it softly, gently, and lovingly. At first, his or her face may not be clear in the mind, but as you continue to let the love flow out from the heart and as concentration progresses, the face of the respected one becomes clear and it becomes apparent that he or she is smiling. The smile intensifies your happiness. As a result of this happiness, your concentration deepens. The loving mind becomes steady with the object. When the mind becomes happy and concentration deepens, the light will appear; both the object and mind will become bright because of concentration. The *mettā* developed toward this person continuously for one to two hours uninterrupted reaches *jhāna* concentration.

Thus, loving-kindness meditation also produces light. One becomes more and more peaceful, and the mind becomes absorbed with love for the object. This is the way to achieve *jhāna* through loving-kindness meditation. *Mettā* meditation leads to attainment of the third *jhāna*, but not the fourth *jhāna*. Why is this so? Because the fourth *jhāna* has only two *jhāna* factors: equanimity (*upekkhā*) and one-pointedness (*ekaggatā*) of mind. It has transcended *sukha*, or happiness, and loving-kindness meditation is strongly associated with happiness. Happiness is its end. Therefore, one cannot reach the fourth *jhāna* through loving-kindness meditation, since it has only equanimity and one-pointedness but does not have *sukha*.



After successfully attaining *jhāna* by radiating love to the respected person, one changes to another respected person or dear friend to make the *mettā* more powerful. Then one moves to the second category of person: namely, a neutral person, a person you neither like nor dislike. Keeping her or his image in mind, we send our loving thoughts to this person, “May he or she be well and happy.” Or we call her or his name, “May Jane/Jack be well and happy,” until our mind becomes calm, peaceful, and happy. The image persists, and the love flows and embraces the neutral person. One continues this for one or two hours until one reaches the first *jhāna*.

The last category of person in loving-kindness meditation is an enemy. The enemy may not necessarily be a person whom we dislike; he or she could be one who dislikes us. Sending loving-kindness to this person is a challenge. Sending loving-kindness to oneself, to a respected or dear person, or even to a neutral person, is considered easy, but sending loving-kindness to an enemy is a great challenge. That’s why we do it last, after having developed some skill in this practice. One of my students reported that when sending loving-kindness to an enemy: “I end up with anger, and I want to punch him!” Another reported: “I am so worried that my enemy will become well and happy.” This isn’t an easy task, is it?

To avoid having your meditation end up in anger, skillful means are needed. First, one should not choose the enemy one hates the most. One should choose the enemy one hates the least, because one’s love is still conditional, not unconditional. It is not necessary to challenge yourself by sending loving-kindness to your greatest enemy; just



choose an enemy that you hate the least to test it out first. This will let you know how much mental strength has been developed.

If we fail, we must learn to forgive others first. Forgiveness is the art of compassion through non-judgment and acceptance of oneself and others.

In the long cycle of births and deaths, often we do wrong to others, sometimes others do wrong to us. Shall we carry the grudge along through life and make ourselves unhappy? To forgive others is in fact being kind to ourselves.

If we succeed in sending loving-kindness to the person we hate the least, then we can move on to another enemy that we hate more. If this meditation is not successful, go back to the respected person until the mind becomes happy and concentrated. Based on the power of concentration thus developed, it becomes easy to send loving-kindness to the hated one. If that is successful, move on again until we come to our greatest enemy—if we have one. In fact, the greatest enemy is our own ego-centeredness, grounded on ignorance. We regard others as our enemies when we are harmed by them. Is not the harm we experience now the result of our unskillful actions done in the past? When we inflict pain on others, shall we not feel the same pain and suffering they are feeling? The law of karma says all actions have their reactions. With this understanding, we shall not harbor any hate to anyone even if we are harmed. When the fire of hate is left unchecked, it proliferates through life after life. We suffer not because of our enemy, but by our own



hate. Not harboring any hatred for anyone, who else can be our enemy?

But for this practice, you still have to choose a person who is a real enemy that you hate. For those who have no enemy at all, this is a blessing. Alas, even though we only have love for others, some may not like us owing to their own reasons, just as Lord Buddha hated no one and yet Devadatta did not like him. So Devadatta is considered his enemy, although Buddha loved him like his own son. You can take the person who does not like you as the object of *mettā* meditation.

Loving-kindness meditation is capable of improving the relationship between yourself and the hated person. By constantly radiating loving-kindness to those who do not like us, we are sure to soften their hearts and win a battle hard to win.

If you are successful in sending loving-kindness to an enemy—whether a person for whom you have a slight dislike or a person who is your greatest enemy—then it is necessary to practice again among the four groups of people until our *mettā* to them is equal. This is known as “breaking the barrier,” or *mettā* without discrimination.

To summarize, we have four groups of people: oneself, a respected or dear person, a neutral person, and an enemy. Now your task is to “break the barrier.” What does that mean? It means your love for these four groups of people must be the same and without any discrimination. If your love for yourself is more than your love for another, or if your love for any one of the four is more than for the others, the barrier is still there. If you



find it easy to send loving-kindness to yourself or to your respected person but not to the neutral one, the barrier is still there. If you can easily radiate love to yourself, the respected person, and a neutral person, but not to the enemy, the barrier is still there. So in order to break this barrier, you have to send loving-kindness to yourself, the respected person, the neutral person, and the enemy over and over again until you feel that your love for the four types of persons is equal; then you have broken the barrier.

Suppose there are four groups of people gathered in a ship, and a robber wants to kill one of the four persons. Whom should you give away to be killed among these four persons: yourself, the loved one, the neutral person, or your enemy? If you think you should sacrifice yourself in order to save others, this is compassion and not loving-kindness, because you do not have love for yourself. If you give away your enemy, thinking he deserves to be killed, your *mettā* is still tainted by discrimination. So, no one should be given away to be killed. If you choose any one of the four to be given away to the robber, this is a sign of partiality. Your loving-kindness is not equal among the four. Recognizing this partiality and overcoming it by letting "I" absorb in the "all," without any distinction whatsoever—this is how one breaks the barrier. Only then does your loving-kindness become unconditional and without bias or preference. This is the culmination of *mettā*.

One may also develop the practice of *mettā* without discrimination in this way:



"May I be well, happy, and peaceful.

May my beloved person also be well, happy, and peaceful.

May I be well, happy, and peaceful.

May my respected person also be well, happy, and peaceful.

May I be well, happy, and peaceful.

May my neutral person also be well, happy, and peaceful.

May I be well, happy, and peaceful.

May my enemy also be well, happy, and peaceful.

May I be well, happy, and peaceful.

May my beloved person, my respected person, my neutral person, and my enemy all be well, happy, and peaceful."

All the above-mentioned constitute the traditional way of practicing *mettā*. Here, I would also like to recommend another way of practice. Through my teaching experiences, I have found that many people, especially Westerners, have difficulty radiating *mettā* to themselves. To overcome such difficulties, one can divide "I" into mind and body, the latter of which consists of the elements. Paying attention to one's body, mentally recite, "May the four elements of the body be well and balanced,"



repeatedly. Or, while mentally reciting, "May the four elements of the body be well and balanced," at the same time scan the body from the top of the head down to the toes, repeatedly. After twenty to thirty minutes, radiate *mettā* to your mind thus: "May this mind element be happy, peaceful, and contented" (or whatever words suit you most). Say this repeatedly until you feel happy and peaceful. Many of my students find this way of practicing *mettā* is soothing and achieves the end.

In the same way, we can divide the respected person, neutral person, and enemy into the four elements and the mind element, and wish them to be well and happy. By separating a being into elements, attachment, which is the near enemy of *mettā*, cannot creep into our heart while we are radiating *mettā* to the loved one; and anger, which is the far enemy of *mettā*, will not burn the undeveloped mind while radiating *mettā* to an enemy. It is also a reminder to us that in the ultimate sense, only the four elements and the mind exist; there are no persons, beings, respected ones, or enemies.

6. The Blessings of Practicing Loving-Kindness

There are 11 blessings for those who practice loving-kindness constantly:

- I. One sleeps happily.
- II. One wakes up happily.
- III. One does not suffer bad dreams.

Nowadays, to sleep and wake up happily without bad dreams has become a luxury. Many people



have to depend on sleeping pills in order to have sound sleep. Practicing loving-kindness ensures that you sleep happily and wake up happily.

IV. One is dear to human beings.

When you radiate loving-kindness to all sentient beings, a very wholesome and pure vibration comes from your heart and reaches others, and, as a result, others love you. We are so preoccupied with relationship-suffering and put so much of our time and energy into worrying about relationships, be it with partners, family members, neighbors or co-workers. This result of loving-kindness is a great blessing because it helps us with relationships and makes life more joyful.

V. One is dear to nonhuman beings (see "How the *Mettā Sutta* Came Into Existence").

VI. One is protected by heavenly beings.

Devas and all the heavenly beings protect one who has loving-kindness. That's why loving-kindness is one of the four protective meditations.

VII. One is protected from fire, weapons, and poisons.

While radiating loving-kindness, one cannot be easily harmed by any weapons because the power of love forms a protective field or net that cannot be pierced by weapons. Many stories from the Buddha's time show how one is protected from weapons when radiating *mettā*.

King Udena had two wives, Samavati, who was a devoted disciple of the Buddha, and Magandiya, who bore a grudge against the Buddha and towards Samavati as well. Magandiya plotted to make King Udena believe that Samavati was trying to kill him. Believing her lie, King Udena went to



shoot Samavati with his bow and arrow. But, upon seeing King Udena and understanding his intention, Samavati entered into *mettā jhāna*. When the arrow reached her, it dropped to the ground without touching her at all.

VIII. One is able to concentrate easily.

When practicing loving-kindness, one feels abundant happiness. The Buddha said that happiness is the proximate cause for concentration. Thus one's mind easily becomes concentrated, up to attainment of the third jhāna.

IX. One has a clear and serene facial expression.

When one has *mettā* in the heart, one's expression becomes clear and serene. This is because the loving mind produces many clear mind-born particles. Among the eight elements in those particles, the color becomes very bright. As a result, the facial expression also becomes clear. This is natural beauty, unlike the artificial appearance that comes from putting different colors of make-up on the face. Those women who love beauty should practice more loving-kindness meditation.

X. One dies unburdened or one dies peacefully.

It is a great blessing to be unburdened as death approaches. Many people die in a state of confusion, fear, and bewilderment. Departing from one's own body, from a lovely son, daughter, and spouse, and from property earned with hard work may be deemed by some people to be the hardest thing to do. Most people, while alive, enjoy the comfort of their homes, property, and association with loved ones. What we habitually hold onto



becomes extremely difficult to let go of, even while we are alive, let alone when death approaches. Not wanting to depart from those things, most people die in fear and confusion. Being reborn in one of the four woeful states is expected for a person who dies in fear. A person who dies with a mind unburdened because of loving-kindness is sure to be reborn either in a human realm or higher realm. This is indeed a great blessing. As Buddhists, we are not working for this life only, but also for a happy existence in the next life.

- XI. One may be reborn in the Brahma world when one dies.

When a yogi meditates on loving-kindness, which is a concentration object, he can move on to *vipassanā* and progress through different stages of insight. If he fails to become a noble one—a *Sotāpanna*, *Sakadagami*, *Anāgāmi*, or *Arahant*—he will at least be reborn in the Brahma world if he can maintain his *jhāna* up to his dying moment.

In addition to all these 11 blessings, *mettā*—the embodiment of universal love—is very much needed in this self-oriented world. If we can regard each other with a loving heart in the spirit of oneness, the world will be a better place in which to live.

7. How the *Mettā Sutta* Came into Existence

The *Mettā Sutta* is a very popular *sutta* in the Theravada tradition. The Buddha first taught the *Mettā Sutta* to a group of 500 monks, each of whom went into



the forest with one alms bowl and a set of three robes. After they had walked for about 100 *yojanas*, they came to a large village. The people of this village asked them to stay in the adjacent forest for *vassa*, the three-month retreat that takes place during the rainy season. This large forest was very calm and quiet, entirely free from the noise that can normally be heard in many villages and small towns. There were many tall trees and clusters of bamboo, and the forest was extremely dense, so that the thick foliage prevented much sunlight from hitting the ground. There was also a little creek, which made it very pleasant and peaceful, and not very far from this bamboo grove was a village where they could walk on their alms round. The monks decided to stay in this forest, as it seemed to be a very congenial place for them to practice meditation. After the decision had been made, the villagers built 500 huts and offered them to the monks, so they could spend the *vassa* there. After all the huts were finished, each of the monks moved into a hut and started to practice *vipassanā* meditation.

With the arrival of the monks, who were endowed with *sīla*, *samādhi* and *pañña* (morality, concentration, and wisdom), the forest *devas* who lived in the trees were afraid to stay there any longer. Holding onto their children, they wandered aimlessly about the forest paths. The *devas* initially thought that the monks were only temporary visitors who would not stay very long, perhaps only one or two days, and then leave. However, the monks did not leave after a few days but stayed at first for ten days and then another five days. Soon, the *devas* began to suffer from the way they had to live, and they hoped that the monks would soon leave, so that they could live there



happily. To make the monks leave, they created frightening noises and emitted bad odors. All the monks became terrified, and, as a result, their fear broke their concentration. Some of the monks suffered from fever and pain, while others felt dizzy. They felt that it was impossible for them to continue their meditation practice. Finally, they went back to Jetavana monastery where the Buddha was residing during *vassa*. When the Buddha saw them, he asked them why they had come back, and they told him exactly what had happened.

After the monks had related their tale, they asked the Buddha to suggest a suitable place for them to meditate. The Buddha answered, "My beloved monks, go back to exactly the same forest and practice your meditation there." Hearing this, the monks replied, "Please do not send us back to that forest; it is impossible to practice meditation there." Understanding their anxiety, the Buddha said "Dear monks, you went there to practice meditation without a weapon, therefore you have encountered many distractions and difficulties. This time, however, I will give you a weapon." Then the Buddha gave them a powerful weapon, the *Mettā Sutta*. The monks did not dare to contradict the wishes of the Buddha and went back armed with the *Mettā Sutta*. However, the monks still did not feel very brave. They lived with feelings of fear and anxiety because they never knew when or where they might come across a frightening vision or a maddening sound.

Nevertheless, because of the virtuous quality of their *mettā* practice, the monks did not see or hear any more frightening objects. Whereas the devas had



previously been hostile, now their anger and resentment disappeared when they felt the monks' *mettā*. Feeling this *mettā*, the *devas*' minds were filled with respect and reverence, and they welcomed the monks and paid their respects. They went up to the monks, took their alms bowls and spare robes, and carried these things to their respective huts. They welcomed them as they might have welcomed their own parents, brothers, or sisters after a journey to a distant country. They no longer attacked or taunted them. The *devas* even provided safety from other dangers and supported the monks, so that they could practice meditation peacefully. *Mettā* is without doubt a very powerful and wholesome force that can always be depended upon for protection.

In fact, all 500 monks practiced *vipassanā* meditation with *mettā* meditation as their foundation. Since they were able to practice meditation peacefully, they were all able to abandon all defilements and become *Arahants* during that *vassa*. The Buddha had foreseen this, and for this reason, he had sent them back to the forest. When the monks reflected on this incident, they realized that they had encountered many difficulties and hindrances because they had tried to practice *vipassanā* meditation without the beneficial protection of *mettā* meditation. After consulting the Buddha, they heeded his advice and first practiced *mettā* meditation and then *vipassanā* meditation. Only then were they free from all dangers, undisturbed mentally or physically, culminating eventually in the attainment of *Nibbāna*.



The Simile of the Vipers

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Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Samma-Sambuddhassa (x3)





Run, run, run....

The near shore is full of dangers—
four poisonous vipers, five murderers,
and six robbers.

Run, run, run....

Run to the far shore that is safe
and secure—Nibbāna.



*Few among men are those who cross to the farther shore.
The rest, the bulk of men, only run up and down the hither
bank.*

—Dhammapada 85—

A very important *sutta*, especially for those who want to fully know the practice of insight meditation, is “*The Simile of the Vipers*” from the *Samyutta Nikāya*. This *sutta* starts with the following story:

A man had committed an offense. The king wanted to put him in jail but could not find any evidence. So the king assigned him the job of looking after four poisonous snakes. Every day this man had to take care of the snakes.



From time to time, the snakes had to be fed, to be picked up and put down, to be bathed, and to be put to sleep. The man thought this task was a reward given by the king, and very happily he did his duties.

But one day, a wise friend approached the man and told him that if one or another of the vipers ever becomes angry with him, the man would meet his death or experience deadly suffering. So, he should let go of the snakes and run. So the man, now afraid of the four vipers full of fierce heat and deadly venom, fled first in one direction and then in another.

The ministers reported to the king that the man had fled. Then the king sent five murderers to chase after the man. The man's wise friend appeared again and told the man that five murderers were pursuing him, wanting to take his life on the spot if they found him, and that the man should run as fast as possible. So the man, afraid of the four poisonous snakes and the five murderers, fled first in one direction and then in another.

When the king found out that the snakes and the murderers could not kill the man, he spoke to his ministers: "First, when he was pursued by the vipers, he fled here and there, tricking them. Now, when pursued by five murderers, he flees even more swiftly. We have not been able to catch him, but perhaps by trickery we can. Therefore, send as a murderer with drawn sword an intimate companion from his youth, one who used to eat and drink with him. Because this person has been his intimate companion, the man will not be aware that he has an evil intention." The ministers then sought out such a



companion and sent him to murder the man. Luckily the man's wise friend appeared again and revealed the truth to the man. He told the man to be wary and run away as fast as possible.

Now the man was afraid of the four snakes, the five murderers, and another murderer with drawn sword who pretended to be his intimate companion. He fled further and reached an empty village that had only six houses. Whichever house he entered was void, deserted, empty. Whatever cooking pot he lifted up was void, hollow, empty.

The man thought it was time for him to rest and that he would remain in the deserted village for a while. But the man's wise friend appeared and told him that the village had just been raided by six robbers, who may return, so the man should not stay there and should leave immediately. Without resting, the man continued to flee until he came to a great expanse of water where the current was swift. The man realized the near shore was frightening and full of dangers—the four snakes, the five murderers, the sixth murderer with drawn sword who was the intimate companion, and the six robbers—but that the far shore was safe and free of dangers. However, there was no ferryboat or bridge for crossing over from the near shore to the far shore.

Then the man thought, "Let me collect grass, twigs, branches, and foliage, and bind them together into a raft, so that by means of that raft, making an effort with my hands and feet, I can get safely across to the far shore." So he collected grass, twigs, branches, and foliage, and bound



them together into a raft. By means of that raft, making an effort with his hands and feet, he safely crossed to the far shore. After crossing over and going beyond, the man stood on high ground.

Summary of the Metaphors

What are the four poisonous snakes? They are the four elements. Who are the five murderers? They are the five aggregates of clinging. Who pretends to be an intimate friend but is actually an enemy? This is craving. To what does the village with six empty houses refer? The six sense-bases. Who are the six attacking robbers? They are the six sense-objects. What is the great expanse of water? This represents the four floods of sensuality, existence, becoming, and ignorance.

The near shore, which is dangerous and frightening, is a designation for identity-view. The raft that helps the man cross to the other shore is the Noble Eightfold Path. Making effort with one's hands and feet is a designation for the arousing of the fourfold right effort; one has to walk the path by way of one's own effort. The other shore is *Nibbāna*. Crossing over, going beyond, and standing on high ground is a designation for the *Arahant*.

The four elements, five aggregates of clinging, craving, six sense-bases and six sense-objects, identity-view, the four floods of sensuality, existence, becoming, and ignorance, the Noble Eightfold Path, the fourfold right effort, and *Nibbāna* are all *dhammas* that should be known by one pursuing the path.



The Four Elements

Why are the four elements represented by four poisonous snakes in the *sutta*? To understand this point, we have to train in the four-elements meditation. This particular subject of meditation is undertaken to understand the reality of the body as it actually is. The Lord Buddha taught the four-elements meditation in two ways: in detail and in brief.

The Buddha taught the brief way in the discourse on the “Four Foundations of Mindfulness,” given to the Kuru people, who were very sharp and quick to understand. The Buddha stated, *“A recluse reviews this very body, however it is positioned or placed, as consisting of just elements thus: ‘There are in this body just the earth element, the water element, the fire element, and the wind element.’”* (Majjhima Nikāya [MN] 10). Such concise instruction is beyond the comprehension of most of us.

What of those who have sluggish wisdom? For them the Buddha taught this subject in detail in the discourses “Exhorting Rahula” (MN 62) and “Analysis of the Elements” (MN 140). In these two middle-length discourses, he skillfully used conventional truth to bring about the realization of ultimate truth. In reference to the earth element, his instruction is as follows: *“Monastics, what is earth element? It can be either internal or external. What is internal? Whatever is taken as belonging to oneself that is solid, substantial, and clung to: head-hairs, body-hairs, nails, teeth, skin, flesh, sinews, bones, bone-marrow, kidneys, heart, liver, diaphragm, spleen, lungs, large intestines, small intestines, contents of the stomach, feces, or*



whatever else internally, belonging to oneself, is solidified, substantial, and clung to, this is called the 'internal' earth element."

This body, which is seen in conventional reality as an undivided unit, is composed in ultimate reality of the four elements: earth element (*pathavi dhātu*), water element (*āpo dhātu*), fire element (*tejo dhātu*), and wind element (*vāyo dhātu*). The *Pāli* word *dhātu*, translated as "element," is an ultimate property or characteristic. Each of the four elements has its own particular characteristic.

What is the characteristic of the earth element? When we see the earth, what strikes the mind? Hardness. Hardness is the characteristic of the earth element. Its function is to act as a foundation (for the other primary elements), and it manifests as receiving the other three elements. The earth element has six aspects that exist in relation to one another:

- (1 and 2) Hardness versus softness
- (3 and 4) Roughness versus smoothness
- (5 and 6) Heaviness versus lightness.

Hardness and softness cannot exist together but are relative to each other. When something is not so hard, it is soft. The same relation exists in the other two pairs. When something is not so rough, it is smooth. When it is not so heavy, it is light. Understanding these relations is fundamental to discerning the earth element.

One starts the practice of four-elements meditation by reciting the twenty parts of the body that have the earth element as the predominant factor: *head-hairs, body-*



hairs, nails, teeth, skin, flesh, sinews, bones, bone-marrow, kidneys, heart, liver, diaphragm, spleen, lungs, large intestines, small intestines, contents of the stomach, feces and brain. As the parts are recited one by one, gradually the hardness becomes clear. To help make the characteristic clear, you can bite down or clench the teeth to feel the hardness. Then, move your awareness from the top of the head down to the soles of the feet to discern hardness in the body. When hardness becomes clear throughout the body, you can start to discern roughness. You can rub your skin to feel the roughness, and move your awareness from the top of the head down to the soles of the feet to discern roughness. Move your awareness in the same way to discern softness, smoothness, heaviness, and lightness.

The second element is the water element. When you see water, what first appears to the mind? Flowing. Thus, flowing is the characteristic of water element. How can the water element be discerned in the body? There are twelve parts of the body that have the water element as the predominant factor: *bile, phlegm, pus, blood, sweat, fat, tears, grease, spittle, snot, joint oil, urine.*

When you think of sweat, blood, tears, or urine, the characteristic of flowing will become clear to the mind. According to the Abhidhamma, the water element cannot be sensed by way of touch, as it is not a tangible object. The water element can only be discerned by the mind. If you touch water, you may feel pressure, but pressure is an aspect of the wind element. You may feel cold when touching water, but coldness (temperature) is an aspect of the fire element. You may feel the softness of the water,



but softness is an aspect of the earth element. You cannot feel the flowing of the water; flowing cannot be discerned by way of touch.

Another aspect of the water element is cohesion, or binding, and this is the force that binds the body together. All of our organs are bound together because of the water element. Without the water element, the organs and limbs would scatter, and there would be no shape. In meditation, sometimes one feels tightness within the body; this is the cohesion of the water element.

The third element is the fire element. Heat, or temperature, is the characteristic of the fire element. There are four aspects of the fire element in the body. The first type is the heat that warms up the body; you feel hot because this heat is flowing well, and you feel cold when it is not. This heat is neither you nor I; it is only the function of the fire element. The second aspect is the heat that matures or ages the body. For example, your hair turns grey with age because of this aspect of the fire element. Those who have excessive fire element in the body have hair that turns grey easily. The third type is digestive heat, which digests what you consume; what you have eaten or drunk. This digestive heat is produced by our past karma. Because of some un-wholesome past karma, in this life one may have poor digestive fire. The fourth type is the heat of fever.

The fourth element is the wind element. It has pushing, supporting, and moving as its characteristics. The supporting action of the wind element keeps the body



straight, and pushing makes the body bend and the hands flex and move.

The body is made of these four elements. The earth element serves as the foundation for the other three elements. The body has coherence because of the water element, is maintained by the fire element, and is supported by the wind element. The body is only a group of elements: This is the reality of this body. Because of not knowing this truth as it really is, we regard the body as “I,” “mine,” and “myself.” Thus, one clings to the idea of a permanent body that can be relied upon. To develop knowledge of the body as it really is, keep contemplating the four elements, either through the detailed way or the brief way, one after another, from the top of the head down to the soles of the feet, repeatedly. When you feel the hardness of the whole body, know that it is the earth element. When you feel that the body has coherence, know that it is the water element. When you feel the bodily temperature, know it is the fire element. When you feel the supporting force that maintains your posture, know that is the wind element. Hardness, cohesion, heat, and supporting are just characteristics of their respective elements, not “I,” not “myself.” Without contemplating the body in this way, it is difficult to realize the non-self nature of the body. You need to discern four elements repeatedly until knowledge arises.

When concentration deepens, the body turns out to be bubbling, with no solidity at all. Some meditators, through the power of concentration and by seeing the four elements again and again throughout the body, see the elements break into millions of particles, vibrating,



arising, and passing away incessantly. On repeatedly seeing these uncontrollable phenomena arising and passing away, one realizes the solidity of the body is just an illusion.

Previously, one was so enchanted with the body, thinking that it is real, fit, and beautiful. Now, through correct seeing, one is awakened, and the body is seen as just particles coming together and falling apart repeatedly. The view of the body as “I,” “mine,” “myself” can no longer be maintained. Because of this direct experience, one knows there is nothing in the body one can hold on to. One starts to let go of the belief that the body can be relied upon for happiness. Letting go has to be achieved by seeing rightly, grounded upon one’s practical experience.

From time to time, the elements go out of balance. At these times, the four elements are like four poisonous snakes. Earth element can be compared to an earth snake. If the hardness in the body becomes excessive, we feel stiff and rigid, and mobility becomes difficult. At that time, we feel like we have been bitten by the earth snake. Excessive hardness can cause death as well. We have to take care of this poisonous snake by exercising the body.

If the water element is in excess, what will happen to the body? Excessive water element may cause swelling and diarrhea. At that moment one is bitten by the water snake.

When the body is overheated, or when one has a fever, one is attacked by the fire snake. This fire snake is very dangerous and may cause death. It is important to take care of the fire snake properly.



If the wind element is insufficient in the body, one may get a stroke and the body cannot move well. Excessive wind causes belching and bloating in the stomach. At these times, the wind snake is furious. Thus, the Buddha compared the four elements to four dangerous poisonous snakes.

It is important to learn what causes imbalance of the body. There are four causes: food, temperature, karma, and mind. When extremely spicy food is swallowed, the heat of the body becomes excessive. One has to balance it by taking more cooling food. When the weather is too hot or too cold, the body also loses its balance.

Negativity of mind also can cause imbalance of the elements. For example, when one gets angry, excessive heat will be produced in the body, causing the fire element to go out of balance. When the body is ill, most people cling to the body and think, "I am sick." Owing to the grasping, the illness becomes even worse. But if one can cultivate equanimity toward whatever happens in the body, even if the body is sick, the mind is unmoved. The state of equanimity produces pure energy that heals the body. This is what we call matter born of mind.

Our past karma will also affect the body. The Buddha many times was afflicted with back pain; this was because, in one of his past lives, he was a wrestler. He used to break the opponent's back bones. Because of this bad karma, the Buddha had to suffer back pain as a karmic result.

Whatever pain arises in the body, just know it as an imbalance of the elements. Don't cling to the pain as "my



pain.” See hardness, heat, vibration, stiffness, etc., as elements; they are not “my hardness,” “my heat,” vibration as “I,” etc. This way of contemplation helps one to let go of the clinging and helps to remove the perception of self. All suffering comes from clinging to the self, which is just an illusion. When one dis-identifies self from the body, one’s mind becomes at ease and free.

One should also extend the knowledge of the four elements to external bodies; thus one can contemplate, for example, the body of one’s beloved or of a person one hates. People are attracted to their loved ones and dislike those they hate because they do not understand that their bodies are also just a group of elements. We have to contemplate internally as well as externally to get rid of likes and dislikes. How do we discern externally? When we realize that our body is composed of these impersonal four elements, we can project this understanding to an external person, especially to those one hates or loves. Which elements do you hate or love? Earth, water, fire, or wind? By investigating in this way, one loses the perception of a “being” or a “person.” Finding that no one is there, one further abandons the obsessive emotions of lust and aversion.

If you have craving for and are clinging to inanimate things, such as cars, jewelry, a big house, clothing, etc., contemplate them as the four elements to stop clinging to them. They are in fact composed of four elements, are they not? Practice in this way to develop detachment to people and things. All suffering comes from clinging and self-identification. When suffering arises, investigate the



causes of your suffering. Work to remove the cause; when the cause is removed, the effect—suffering—will cease.

By seeing the four elements in the body internally and externally, without a maker, experiencer, abider, and actor, a yogi is immersed in voidness.

The Five Aggregates

Now we come to the five murderers. The five murderers are the five aggregates of clinging: the materiality aggregate, the feeling aggregate, the perception aggregate, the formations aggregate, and the consciousness aggregate.

What is the materiality aggregate of clinging? There are four primary elements and twenty-four types of derived materiality (four elements times six senses). The twenty-four types of derived materiality include the sensitivity of eye, ear, nose, tongue and body, with their respective objects of sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and tangible objects. The materiality aggregate (*rūpa-kkhandā*) is the body in the conventional sense.

The second aggregate is the feeling aggregate (*vedanākkhandā*). In Buddhism, the word feeling is much more specific than the standard English definition, which is synonymous with emotion. The word “feeling” in the context of the aggregates means only the mental feeling of pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral. (Emotions belong to the fourth aggregate, discussed below).

We cling to feelings even more so than to the body. When the eyes see a sensually enticing object, pleasant



eye-contact occurs and a pleasant feeling arises. If one is not aware of that pleasant feeling and does not understand its impermanence, craving is sure to follow. When the visible object is unpleasant, unpleasant feeling arises, which activates the latent tendency of aversion. Feelings arise beyond our control. We cannot prevent a feeling from arising, but we can be aware of it. Feeling is just a mental state, and it is conditional. It comes and goes. What is conditional and changing cannot be regarded as a permanent self. Without awareness of what is happening at the moment of sense contact—that feelings (pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral) are born of the six contacts of eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind—the mind is beset by greed, hatred, and delusion, and there is no way to liberation.

Craving follows after pleasant feeling. If that craving is left unchecked, the force intensifies and becomes clinging. Thus, it is said that dependent on craving, grasping comes to be. Grasping means holding on tightly to what one desires. At this point, the mind becomes very agitated and enslaved because of the sensual urge. In order to satiate the intense craving, the body has to act. That action, whether it is wholesome or unwholesome, is called karma-process-becoming, because it paves the way to rebirth. Thus dependent on clinging, karma-process-becoming arises. When that particular karma ripens, rebirth arises. Dependent on birth, there arises aging, sickness, and death. Thus arises the whole mass of suffering. Therefore, the feeling aggregate is like a murderer who triggers the vicious reactions that fuel the continuous cycle of rebirths. It's very important to stop feeling before it turns to craving. Because craving arises



owing to feeling, we have to learn to be aware of feeling first. Since feelings arise all the time, mindfulness is to be extended continuously throughout the day.

When pleasant feeling arises, we first become aware of its presence, then understand its characteristic of being felt, its function of experiencing the desirable aspect of the agreeable object, and its manifestation of relishing the object and pleasing both mind and body. By understanding a feeling's individual essence, one does not grasp that feeling as oneself. Further, one contemplates pleasant feeling as a formed, conditional, and dependently arisen state. Look upon the arising feeling dispassionately. One can see the feeling as fleeting, as foreign, as a third party, as empty or devoid of self. The Buddha repeatedly said: *"Whatever feeling [one has] is impermanent and subject to destruction."* If we have this understanding, feelings lose their power to activate the underlying tendency of craving.

The sense-contact causes pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral feeling to arise. Since sense-contact occurs all the time, feelings are also arising all the time at tremendous speed, but our mindfulness is relatively slow and sluggish, so we become entangled and tenaciously hold on to feeling. Even if we remember to be aware of feeling, identity-view immediately identifies feeling as "I," as "myself." This enhances the ego illusion. If feeling were actually ours, we could exercise controlling power to have only pleasant feeling. But feeling does not succumb to our command.



Feeling is a mental state that has the function of experiencing the desirable and undesirable nature of an object at the very moment of sense-contact, and it immediately falls away and re-arises. To rise and fall incessantly is the nature of all compounded phenomena. When, due to ignorance, we are unable to break down the compactness of continuity of this incessant stream of feelings through alert mindfulness and wisdom, we assume that feeling is a unity, that it has a core, or that it is an entity within its experiencer. But feeling is not "I" or "myself"; seeing feeling as such is the correct seeing.

The third aggregate is the perception aggregate (*saññakkhandā*). Perception perceives the qualities of an object and makes a sign regarding those qualities so these qualities can be recognized or perceived again in the future. For example, the first time an elephant is seen, one notices a trunk, long curved ivory tusks, and large ears. The trunk, long curved ivory tusks, and large ears become conditions for recognizing an elephant when it is seen again.

The experience of the six cords of sensual pleasure leaves its happy impression on the heart. Because that happy impression is noted or memorized by perception, we long for the enjoyment of the six cords of sensual pleasure again. But, in fact, every experience is new. If perception perceives the misery and the danger of sensual pleasure, the mind will not long for the enjoyment of sensual pleasure. It is common that when one perceives, the mind starts to proliferate and to become engaged. Perception also takes what is wrong to be right. Owing to perverted or distorted perception, humans perceive



phenomena that arise to be permanent, to be happiness, and to be a self. Once a phenomenon is perceived in a distorted manner, the misperception is imprinted deeply in the mind and becomes very difficult to correct. Perverted perception causes wrong thinking. Wrong thinking causes grasping.

The fourth aggregate is the aggregate of formations (*sankhārakkhandha*). Its characteristic is the forming, fabricating, and constructing that accumulates karma. One of the formations, volition, specifically, is called karma. For example, when a man has the volition to kill in mind, following that intention (construction), he performs the unskillful karma of killing that paves the way to an unhappy rebirth in the future. On the other hand, when he has the volition to abstain from killing, he forms the good karma of abstaining from killing that paves the way to a happy rebirth in the future.

When one practices mindfulness of breathing—this forms a wholesome mental karma because at that time the mind is secluded from sensual clinging. However, such good karma still leads to becoming. Why? Because the latent defilement of ignorance blinds us to think that the mind that is aware of the breath is a self; the latent defilement of craving makes the mind delight in the existence of both the breath and the knowing mind itself—which is craving for existence. Latent ignorance and craving are the two root causes that bring renewed existence—in this case, a happy existence.

The formations aggregate constructs many wholesome and unwholesome mental factors, such as



happiness, mindfulness, concentration, effort, wisdom, equanimity, faith, shame of wrongdoing, lust, aversion, conceit, covetousness, jealousy, wrong view, etc. The arising of these wholesome and unwholesome mental factors causes one to perform corresponding skillful and unskillful karmas accordingly. The untrained mind simply takes these mental factors as “I” and “mine” and gets caught in ego illusion. **Every wholesome and unwholesome karma performed feeds the ego constantly until it becomes as stable as if it were a permanent and enduring self.** When this self becomes unmanageable like an entangled ball of thread, disentangling it becomes extremely difficult.

In short, the formations aggregate, with volition as the leader—is responsible for all karmas performed. Wholesome and unwholesome formations, once in existence, leave behind a karmic tendency that will produce a new birth when it meets with favorable conditions. Where there is birth, aging and death follow. Thus the formations aggregate is also a murderer who kills us in the cycle of death and rebirth.

The fifth aggregate is the aggregate of consciousness (*viññanakkhandā*). There are six types of consciousness: eye-, ear-, nose-, tongue-, body-, and mind-consciousness. The characteristic of consciousness is to know or cognize the object. With the arising of an object, consciousness arises simultaneously to cognize the object. This occurs at a tremendous speed and with seeming continuity. During this process, it seems as if an enduring being is experiencing phenomena. The truth of impermanence is hidden by the compactness of this apparent continuity.



Consciousness is actually arising and passing away very rapidly in succession, but we are unable to break down the seeming continuity of consciousness and we mistake it for an enduring self.

When the eye comes into contact with visible objects, with attention, eye-consciousness arises, seeing form. If internally the eye is intact but no external forms come into its range, and there is no corresponding conscious engagement, then there is no manifestation of the corresponding consciousness. If internally the eye is intact and external forms come into its range, and yet there is no attention paid to the object, then there is no manifestation of the corresponding consciousness. If we are unable to understand the causal relationship of eye, visible object, attention, and eye-consciousness, we think it is "I" who sees. If eye-consciousness were "I," when the eye-sensitivity and the visible objects vanish, the so-called "I" also vanishes. From seeing, mind-consciousness starts to recollect, ponder, and examine what has been seen. We further cling to and identify with what we recollect, ponder, and examine as mine and myself, and thus fall prey to craving and identity-view.

Thought is empty by itself; it is projected by our past perception and view. If the mind stays always in the now—the present moment—we can easily see thought arising and passing without entity. It is through our holding on to thought that it seems real and substantial. Thinking the thought is real, we further react physically and verbally to the seemingly "real" thought. Empty the mind of both identity-view and craving, and the mind will perceive the imperceptible.



The five aggregates were compared to murderers. In the Yamaka Sutta (SN 22.85), Venerable Sariputta gave a simile. He said: *"Friend, suppose there was a rich man with much wealth and property, protected by body guards. Then, someone appeared who wanted to ruin him, to harm him, to endanger him, and to take his life. It occurred to the man that this rich man was protected by bodyguards, and it wouldn't be easy to take his life by force. He thought, 'Let me get close to him and then take his life.' Then he approached the rich man and said to him, 'I would like to serve you, sir.' The rich man appointed him as a servant. The man served the rich man very well, rising up before him, retiring after him, doing whatever he wanted. He was agreeable in his conduct and endearing in his speech. Eventually, the rich man considered him a friend and placed trust in him. However, when the man became aware that the rich man had placed trust in him, finding him alone, he took his life with a sharp knife. When the man was serving the rich man, rising up before him, retiring after him, doing whatever he wanted, agreeable in his conduct, endearing in his speech, wasn't he a murderer then even though the others might not recognize him as a murderer?"*

Our five aggregates are compared to a murderer living closely with us though we may not recognize him. Our five aggregates serve us and please us well. We become very intimate with our five aggregates and place trust in our five aggregates. When clinging to the five aggregates grows strong, we will then be killed.

These five aggregates are subject to clinging. And we cling to them firmly with identity-view. Buddha said: *"Suppose, bhikkhus, a dog tied up on a leash was bound to a*



strong post or pillar. If it walks, it walks close to that post or pillar. If it stands, it stands close to that post or pillar. If it sits down, it sits down close to that post or pillar. If it lies down, it lies down close to that post or pillar.

So too, bhikkhus, the uninstructed worldling regards form thus: 'This is mine, this I am, this is my self.' He regards feeling... perception... formations... consciousness thus: 'This is mine, this I am, this is my self.' If he walks, he walks close to those five aggregates subject to clinging. If he stands, he stands close to those five aggregates subject to clinging. If he sits down, he sits down close to those five aggregates subject to clinging. If he lies down, he lies down close to those five aggregates subject to clinging. " (SN 22.100)

The danger of the five aggregates is that they are impermanent, transient, and not a self. This must be thoroughly known, so that letting go of clinging to them becomes possible. If these five aggregates are wrongly grasped by consciousness as permanent, as happiness, and as self, consciousness becomes dependent on them. When consciousness becomes dependent, the future five aggregates are built up. When the future five aggregates are built up, aging, sickness, death, lamentation, sorrow, pain, and despair follow. One is not free from suffering.

Craving

The sixth murderer with drawn sword is our intimate companion. Who is the intimate companion who stays with us all the time? It is craving—the enemy who pretends to be a friend. Craving is always with us in our daily life—whether we are eating, bathing, seeing an agreeable object, listening to music, engaging in sport,



laughing, touching a loved one, thinking, or fantasizing. We eat not only to ease hunger but to satiate craving. If this were not so, obesity would not have become a syndrome of modern society. Craving is the incentive for all our actions. Without the element of craving, what we do seems monotonous and lifeless. Craving is a motivator that keeps us running from one sensual object to the other without weariness.

We crave not only for pleasing and delightful sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and sensations, but also for wealth, social status, companionship, recognition, gain and fame. And we spend our entire life running here and there in pursuit of them, thinking they are intimate friends providing us real security and happiness. Our limited mind regards them as the only happiness worth pursuing. Nothing else can give us happiness. Because the mind is so engrossed in acquiring this type of happiness, we forget that there is another type of happiness—the happiness of not having, the happiness of contentment. When there is gain, there is loss. Calling nothing one's own, one achieves freedom of the heart.

Furthermore, craving is insatiable. The more you get, the more you want. It is the origin of all suffering. Craving pretends to be a good friend, pleasing us in every aspect. But it is really an enemy with a raised sword who is inflicting pain on us and cuts off our life when we get intimate with him.

Craving is stimulated by pleasant feelings, and pleasant feelings are derived from agreeable and delightful sense-contacts. Our senses are open to the



impingement of sense-contact as long as we are conscious. The Buddha likened the experience of contact to the plight of a flayed cow. Wherever it stands, it is nibbled at by the creatures dwelling there, whether against a wall, against a tree, or in water (SN 12.63). We are nearly as helpless, as we stand exposed to constant excitation by the six kinds of contact burdening us with agitation and restlessness.

The pleasing and agreeable sense-contact is called a thorn in Buddha's discipline. Suppose you enter a thorny forest. There would be thorns in front of you, thorns behind you, thorns to your left, thorns to your right, thorns below you, and thorns above you. How can you protect yourself so as not to be pricked by a thorn? You would probably go forward mindfully and go back mindfully, thinking, "May no thorn prick me!"

Another type of craving is the underlying tendency of craving for life that brings us to this world. In the past, influenced by ignorance, and thinking life is joyful, we performed various skillful actions with the hope to get a better rebirth. Those actions left behind karmic energy in our mental stream. We were born here as a result of the maturing of one of those particular karmas. In the present life, owing to the element of craving, we continue to long for future rebirth, regardless of life's painful experiences.

Six Sense-Bases and Six Sense-Objects

In the sutta, the man reaches an empty village with only six houses, and whatever house he enters is void, deserted, empty. The houses are the designation for the six sense-bases. If a wise, competent, intelligent person examines the eye, the eye appears to be void, hollow,



empty. The same is true for the other five sense-bases. So long as the six external sense-objects do not impinge on the six sense-bases, they remain empty and void, unable to function.

The village-attacking robbers represent the six external sense-objects: forms, sounds, smells, tastes, tangible objects, and mental objects. The six sense-objects are reckoned as the six village-attacking robbers because they raid the six sense-bases, resulting in like and dislike, greed and hate. When an agreeable or sensually enticing form impinges on the eye, the body and mind become excited and thrilled with sensual lust. At this point, the village-attacking robber has raided our peace and composure, inflaming us with the fire of lust. If this sensual lust is unfulfilled, one becomes very agitated and restless.

However, when a disagreeable form impinges on the eye, the mind becomes dismayed and wants to turn away, and the body becomes hot and agitated. Again, the village-attacking robber has raided our peace and composure, inflaming us with the fire of aversion. We feel horrible, as if we were being punished by our unskillful thought.

When a neutral form impinges on the eyes, neutral feeling arises. Again, the village-attacking robber has raided our peace and composure, inflaming us with the fire of ignorance. One wrongly thinks that one has no feeling at all and ends up in confusion and bewilderment.

We react in the same manner throughout life whenever agreeable, disagreeable, and neutral sounds, smells, tastes, tangible objects, and mental objects impinge



on the ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind. The village-attacking robbers raid the peace of our mind through the six sense-bases. How does one avoid the assault of these robbers?

Buddha gave the answer through his advice to Bahiya: *"Then, Bahiya, you should train yourself thus: In reference to the seen, there will be only the seen. In reference to the heard, only the heard. In reference to the sensed, only the sensed. In reference to the cognized, only the cognized. That is how you should train yourself. When for you there will be only the seen in reference to the seen, only the heard in reference to the heard, only the sensed in reference to the sensed, only the cognized in reference to the cognized, then, Bahiya, there is no you in terms of that. When there is no you in terms of that, there is no you there. When there is no you there, you are neither here nor yonder nor between the two. This, just this, is the end of stress."* (Udāna)

What Buddha intended to say was: do not conceive of **oneself** seeing, hearing, sensing, and cognizing. If one conceives there is a "self" who sees, hears, senses and cognizes, the mind proliferates with craving and identity-view, and actions will follow. The abandonment of craving and identity-view can be accomplished by strong mindfulness and penetrative wisdom when the sense-impression comes in contact with the sense-door. Mindfulness is the front gate through which one knows what is happening right now, and wisdom penetrates what is seen, heard, sensed, and cognized as simply a cause-effect relationship, an interplay between materiality



and consciousness. This cause-and-effect relationship has no controlling entity behind it.

Another way to avoid the assault of these village-attacking robbers is by guarding the sense faculties so that defilements will not gain access through the sense-bases. The ways to guard one's sense faculties are: 1. **Clear comprehension of pasture** (*gocara sampajañña*)—one focuses on one's concentration object, such as one's in-and-out breath, in all postures so that defilements have no chance to arise. 2. Clear comprehension of non-delusion (*asammoha sampajañña*)—one keeps contemplating the three characteristics of impermanence, suffering, and non-self in what is seen, heard, smelled, tasted, sensed, and cognized.

It is important to bear in mind that neither the six sense-objects nor the six sense-bases are each other's fetters, but rather it is the desire and lust that arise in dependence on both that are the fetters. If the six sense-objects were the fetter of the six sense-bases or if the six sense-bases were the fetter of the six sense-objects, the living of the holy life could not be fulfilled for the complete destruction of suffering (SN 35.232). This is because as long as one has the six sense-bases, one would always be fettered by the six sense-objects.

Identity-View

After fleeing in one direction and then in another, the man in the *sutta* comes to a great expanse of water. The near shore is dangerous and frightening, and the farther shore is safe and free from danger. The near shore



is identity-view. This view wrongly regards the five aggregates as a permanent, unchanging self.

In other words, when one assumes that either one or all of the five aggregates are the self, that the self possesses five aggregates, that the five aggregates are in the self, or that the self is in the five aggregates, identity-view comes about. Or identity-view regards the five aggregates as “mine,” “I,” and “my permanent self.” With this identity-view, one cannot free oneself from suffering.

Suppose there were a river, a mountain torrent, a swift flowing stream that goes a long way. On both its banks there might be growing kasa-grass that overhangs, kusa-grass that overhangs, babbaja-grass that overhangs, and trees that overhang. A man being swept away by that stream might clutch at the kasa-grass, but they might break away, and owing to that he would come to grief. He might clutch at the kusa-grass...he might clutch at the babbaja grass...he might clutch at the trees, but they too break away, and owing to that he would come to grief. Similarly, if anyone grasps form as self, thinking it is firm, secure, and has a core, when his form disintegrates, he might come to grief...If he grasps the pleasant feeling, when his pleasant feeling changes...When he grasps the perception of happiness, when the perception of happiness turns out to be illusive...If he grasps the formations, if the formations are not fulfilled...If he grasps the consciousness, when that consciousness turns out to be like a magician's trick, cheating him, owing to that he might come to grief.



A swift flowing stream is just like our life—ongoing and forever changing. It appears very insecure to most of us if there is no entity to hold on to. We helplessly grasp form, feeling, perception, formations, and consciousness to make us feel secure, stable, and permanent—though the five aggregates are all the time disintegrating. In addition to these internal five aggregates, we grasp the external five aggregates, the aggregates of our loved ones. If the internal five aggregates are themselves fragile, insubstantial, and beyond our control, trying to grasp the external five aggregates is none other than the most futile action. As it's said in the *Dhammapada* (Verse 62):

*"Sons have I, wealth have I,
Thus a fool frets and fusses.
Verily, one self does not exist.
Whence sons? Whence wealth? "*

There are two ways one can free oneself from identity-view. The first is to investigate dependently arising states. The Dependent Origination formula says: "When this exists, that comes to be; with the arising of this, that arises. When this does not exist, that does not come to be; with the cessation of this, that ceases. Nothing arises without causes. On investigation, the cause of each arising physical and mental aggregate reveals itself—the form aggregate arises dependent on karma, consciousness, temperature, and food; the consciousness aggregate arises dependent on name-and-form; the aggregates of feeling, perception, and formations arise dependent on contact. Once these causes are seen, their non-self nature becomes evident.



The second is the resolution of the five aggregates into their individual essence in terms of their characteristic and function. Each aggregate has its characteristic and function. For example, we have learned that perception has the characteristic of perceiving the special quality of an object. The function of perception is to recognize what has been perceived. So when our eyes perceive color or different beautiful visible objects, knowledge knows that this is the work of perception, not a self.

Identity-view is the main culprit responsible for throwing us into woeful states. As long as identity-view is not permanently uprooted from our mental stream, our lives will always tend to move toward rebirth in the four woeful states. To be able to escape from such a rebirth, one must free oneself from identity-view. How? When performing an evil deed, most people firmly hold on to the thought, “I have done wrong. I have made a grave mistake.” We delusively transform that evil deed into a “self” (*attā*) and become greatly distressed by such firmly-held thoughts. Such attachment to the thought of “I” as, “I have made a huge mistake,” makes the karma potent enough to produce a future unhappy existence.

When stream-entry path and fruition are realized, identity-view is extinguished, and the gate to be reborn in the four woeful states is closed. How is it that the innumerable unwholesome karmic actions of the past can become inoperative?

Ledi Sayadaw, a well-known scholar monk from Myanmar, gave the following illustration: *In a string of*



beads where a great number of beads are strung together by a strong silk thread, if one bead is pulled all the others will follow the one that is pulled. But if the silk thread is cut or removed, pulling one of the beads will not disturb the other beads because there is no longer any string binding them together.

Similarly, a being that possesses identity-view harbors a strong attachment to the series of the aggregates arisen during past existences, and transforms them into an ego. Thinking, "In the past I have often been a human being, a deity, or a Brahma," he acquires the thread that is identity-view. It is thus that the innumerable unwholesome karmic actions of the past which have not yet produced results, will accompany that being wherever he may be reborn. These unwholesome actions of the past resemble beads that are strung and bound together by a strong thread.

Beings, however, who clearly perceive the characteristic of not-self and have rid themselves of identity-view, will perceive that the physical and mental aggregates that arise and disappear even within the short period of one sitting, do so as separate phenomena and not as a closely interlinked continuum. The concept of "my self" which is like the thread, is no longer present. Those physical and mental processes appear to them like the beads from which the thread has been removed. They clearly perceive that the unwholesome actions of the past committed by them, are not "persons" nor "beings," not an "I" nor "my actions," but that they arise and disappear in an instant. That is why past unwholesome karma disappears as soon as identity-view disappears.



Four Floods

What is the great expanse of water that is so difficult for the man to cross? This is the flood (*ogha*). There are four types of floods: the flood of sensuality, the flood of existence, the flood of view, and the flood of ignorance. They are floods because they are very difficult to cross and because they send beings to the ocean of *samsāra*, the round of rebirth, again and again.

First is the flood of sensuality. Usually sensuality refers to the enjoyment of the six external objects—pleasant visible objects, sounds, smells, tastes, tangible objects, and mental objects—together with the six internal bases. This sensuality becomes a flood because it overwhelms and hinders. I would like to give an example from “The Shorter Discourse on the Destruction of Craving” (MN 37).

One day, Sakka, ruler of the Heaven of the Thirty-three Gods, who is a stream-enterer (*sotapānna*), went to the Buddha and after paying homage to him, stood at one side and asked, “Venerable Sir, how in brief, is a bhikkhu liberated by the destruction of craving, one who has reached the ultimate end, the ultimate security from bondage, the ultimate holy life, the ultimate goal, one who is foremost among gods and humans?” Buddha gave a brief answer. He said, “*When a bhikkhu has heard that nothing is worth adhering to, he directly knows everything; having directly known everything, he fully understands everything; having fully understood everything, whatever feeling he feels, whether pleasant or painful or neither-painful-nor-pleasant, he abides contemplating*



impermanence in those feelings, contemplating fading away, contemplating cessation, contemplating relinquishment. Contemplating thus, he does not cling to anything in the world. When he does not cling, he is not agitated. When he is not agitated, he personally attains Nibbāna.”

Then Sakka, ruler of gods, delighting and rejoicing in the Blessed One’s words, paid homage to the Blessed One, and he vanished at once.

Venerable Moggallāna, who was sitting not far from the Blessed One, considered whether Sakka had penetrated the meaning of the Blessed One’s words when he rejoiced. Intending to find out the answer, Venerable Moggallāna, who was foremost in supernatural power, vanished from this world and appeared among the gods ruled by Sakka. Now, on that occasion, Sakka was furnished and endowed a hundredfold with the five kinds of heavenly music, and he was enjoying it in the Pleasure Park. When he saw the Venerable Moggallāna coming in the distance, he dismissed the music, and welcomed him. Venerable Moggallāna asked Sakka to repeat what he had just learned from the Buddha so that he might also get to hear that statement.

Sakka felt very embarrassed because he could not remember, although he tried hard to recall what the Buddha had said. Sakka tried to avoid answering the question by showing Venerable Moggallāna the grandeur of his palace. Sakka boasted that it was owing to his great merit that he was able to build such a magnificent palace. Then the Venerable Moggallāna considered thus: “This



spirit is living much too negligently. What if I stirred up a sense of urgency in him?” Then the Venerable Moggallāna performed a feat of supernormal power; by pointing his toe he made the palace shake. Sakka was stirred to a sense of urgency, with his hair standing on end, and the memory suddenly came back to him. He repeated what the Buddha had said to him. Venerable Moggallāna was satisfied.

The experience of Sakka shows that the flood of sensuality makes beings negligent. Once indulging in sensual pleasure, one easily forgets all wholesomeness. Even Sakka, who is a stream-enterer, can forget the *Dharma* personally preached by the Buddha. How much easier would it be for an ordinary person to forget when indulging in sensual pleasure? One must be careful of the flood of sensual pleasures, which, like the vast ocean, is hard to cross.

The second flood is the flood of existence or becoming. As a result of the craving for life, many people want to come to this world again and again. For example, in my monastery in Myanmar, I had interviewed many meditators regarding their past-life experiences. In their past lives, most meditators had offered food to monastics and wished to become a monk or a nun in a future life. This inclination toward another life or the thought of conceiving “I shall be” is the flood of becoming. There are five factors for rebirth—ignorance, craving, clinging, formations, and karma. For example, let's say someone who offers food to the monks prays to be born as a female in a Buddhist country in the next life. In this case, the offering is a wholesome formation. When this wholesome formation passes away, it leaves behind a karmic potency



called karma. Praying to be reborn as a female is craving for life or a new existence. Intense craving for life as a female is clinging. "I shall be" is conceiving. Conceiving is a disease, a dart, and a cancer, as the mind inclines towards a future existence. When the mind inclines towards a future existence, the new five aggregates are built up. Ignorance is not knowing that "female" is just a heap of five aggregates in the ultimate sense. Wrong understanding causes strong craving (clinging) for life as a female. When this karma matures, it brings forth another life. So in this lifetime one becomes what one prayed for. All of us, including non-returners, find the flood of existence difficult to cross. Even a non-returner may remain wishful to be reborn in a material or immaterial world.

The third flood is the flood of view. There are many wrong views, such as wrong view of self, eternalism, annihilation, etc. In this world, many people engage in the wrong view of eternalism (*sassata-ditthi*) and the wrong view of annihilation (*uccheda-ditthi*). Eternalism maintains that the entirety of personal existence exists forever. Annihilationists claim that after death, the entirety of personal existence ends.

Most Asians do not entertain the view of annihilation because they strongly believe in karma and rebirth. But many of them hold to the view of eternalism, wrongly believing that the same soul transmigrates from one life to another life, that it is the same person who takes rebirth. Why do we have this type of view? It is because we do not see with right understanding the constant cessation of formations dependent on conditions.



We see only the arising—of the four elements, of feeling, perception, formations and consciousness—without seeing their constant destruction, cessation, or passing away. Thus the view of eternalism arises.

Annihilationism claims that all mind and matter permanently cease at the time of death and have no continuation whatsoever in a new life. This view denies rebirth. A person who believes in the view of annihilation does not see with right understanding the constant arising of formations produced by causes. When we do not see the constant arising of phenomena, we think that after death everything is annihilated.

The Buddha said that these two views are too extreme, that we should avoid these two views and walk the middle path. What is the middle path? One understands that, dependent on ignorance, karmic formations arise. Dependent on karmic formations, consciousness arises. Dependent on consciousness, mind and matter arise, dependent on mind and matter, the six sense-bases arise; dependent on the six sense-bases, contact arises; dependent on contact, feeling arises; dependent on feeling, craving arises; dependent on craving, clinging arises; dependent on clinging, becoming arises; dependent on becoming, birth arises; dependent on birth, aging, death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair arise. Thus arises this entire mass of suffering (*dukkha*).

These twelve links of Dependent Origination are merely the process of causality. No one undergoes the process in the ultimate sense; this is right view. To



thoroughly understand that there is no one undergoing the cycle of rebirth is extremely difficult, as we greatly attach to the concept of a permanent self.

Another wrong view is not believing that actions produce results. One does not believe that good begets good, and bad begets bad. One denies the workings of karma. What would happen to someone who does not believe in the workings of karma? That person would not be afraid of doing evil deeds and will not try to do good either, believing that such deeds would not bear fruit. Most Asians start the practice with an understanding of the right view of karma and its result, which says that we are the owner of our own karma, heir of our karma, born of our karma; whatever karma we performed, whether good or bad, we are the heir. With this understanding, we try to avoid evil, cultivate the good, and purify the mind. This is the teaching of the Buddha.

The fourth flood is the flood of ignorance (*avijjā*). Ignorance means mental blindness or unknowing. Unknowing of what? Unknowing of the Four Noble Truths—the noble truth of suffering, the noble truth of the origin of suffering, the noble truth of the cessation of suffering, and the noble truth of the path leading to the cessation of suffering. The Buddha said that because of not knowing or penetrating these Four Noble Truths, we remain wandering repeatedly in the rounds of rebirth (SN 56.21).

The Four Noble Truths

The first noble truth is the noble truth of suffering. What is the noble truth of suffering? The five aggregates of



clinging are the truth of suffering. **Craving or desire (lust) for the five aggregates is the second noble truth**—the cause or origin of suffering. A person actually consists of five aggregates, but because we do not see this truth clearly, we are bound to conventional truth, which sees “a person.” Ultimately, there is no person or being, but five aggregates. The five aggregates are an ultimate truth. We use “she,” “her,” “he,” “his” just for the sake of convenience. Why do the five aggregates arise again and again extending onward through many lives? Because we crave for them; in delusion, we think they provide happiness. They do, but only in a transient and fleeting way. Unable to let go of desire for the five aggregates, we are bound. When the mind is bound with craving, the five aggregates reappear again.

The five aggregates ultimately produce suffering. Why suffering? Because the aggregates do not yield to our wishes. They are beyond our control because they share the universal characteristic of impermanence. For example, we may want to have pleasant feeling, which is one of the five aggregates, all the time. However, unpleasant feelings creep in very often, even though the unpleasant feelings are not the feelings we wish for. We may wish that the body will be healthy always, but health often deteriorates. We want to cherish only positive thoughts; however, we find ourselves entangled in the negative emotions of agitation, worry, depression, fear, and doubt most of the time. We feel weary of what is beyond our control, which provides no guarantee of happiness.



What we wish for cannot be fulfilled. That's why it is called suffering. There are also other types of suffering: the suffering of aging, death, dissociation from loved ones, association with the hated, etc.

The third noble truth is the noble truth of the cessation of suffering—*Nibbāna*. It is the cessation of the same cravings which bring forth repeated birth. ***The fourth truth, the path leading to the end of suffering, is the Noble Eightfold Path.***

In the sutta, the man has now come to the near shore. In order to cross the great expanse of water and reach the far shore, he has to make a raft, the vehicle that will help him reach the safe place. What is this raft? The Noble Eightfold Path.

The Noble Eightfold Path

The first factor in the Noble Eightfold Path is right view (*samma ditthi*). There are two types of right view: mundane *vipassanā* right view and supra-mundane path right view. Mundane *vipassanā* right view is repeatedly seeing the five aggregates as impermanent, subject to change, subject to destruction and fading away. Being constantly oppressed by arising and passing away, the five aggregates are painful and terrifying. What is impermanent and painful cannot be regarded as a permanent self. What is impermanent, painful, and not-self is not something to delight in; and what is not something to delight in is not something for which one would arouse greed. Consequently, when the five aggregates both internally and externally are seen as impermanent, painful, and not-self, then one *becomes*



dispassionate toward the five aggregates; one does not delight in the five aggregates. *The greed for the five aggregates fades away*. When one does not inflame greed, one causes cessation of greed momentarily. This is mundane *vipassanā* right view.

As one progresses by seeing the unsatisfactoriness of what is formed again and again, one inclines one's mind towards *Nibbāna*, which is the opposite of the formed. When insight reaches its culmination, the supra-mundane path of stream-entry arises, taking *Nibbāna* as its object. At this point, right view removes the ignorance that covers the Four Noble Truths. Thus, for the first time, one knows and sees the Four Noble Truths as they really are: the Noble Truth of Suffering, the Noble Truth of the Origin of Suffering, the Noble Truth of the Cessation of Suffering, and the Noble Truth of the Path that leads to the Cessation of Suffering, which is the Noble Eightfold Path.

The second factor is right thought. Right thought means applying or directing thought correctly to thoughts of renunciation, non-ill-will, and non-cruelty. We not only contemplate the danger of sensual pleasure to develop thoughts of renunciation, but we also try to “renounce” the concept that there is an “I” enjoying sensual pleasure. Renunciation also means letting go of ideas of who we are, what others think of us, or what we want to achieve—my house, my car, my loved one, my job, my salary, my social status. Such ideas grasp the notion of “mine” and enhance the craving for sensual pleasures even more.

Entering *jhāna* is also seen as a thought of renunciation because when the mind is absorbed in *jhāna*,



thoughts of sensual pleasure are temporarily abandoned. As the Buddha said: *“When concentration is developed, mind is developed; when mind is developed, passion is removed.”*

To remove thoughts of ill-will, we contemplate thoughts of loving-kindness. Because thoughts of ill-will and thoughts of loving-kindness are opposite in nature, they cannot arise at the same time. When thoughts of ill-will arise in the mind, one immediately loses one's happiness. All beings spend their life seeking happiness and avoiding suffering. However, most think happiness comes from without, not from within. The path to real happiness seems to be lost. The wise know happiness comes from within—within the mind of unconditional love for others.

To cultivate the right thought of non-cruelty, one contemplates the thought of compassion for all sentient beings. Compassion makes the heart “quiver” when one sees others in pain and misery. Desire arises to alleviate their pain. All beings wish to be free from all forms of suffering, yet despite these wishes they continue to be troubled by fear, depression, bodily pain, grief, mental anguish, aging, sickness and death. All these forms of suffering are indeed grounded in a self-cherishing attitude. The wise one knows. He cultivates the compassion that embraces the suffering of others. The thought of compassion is very powerful, as it works only for the benefit of others and completely forgets one's own benefit. When the mind is not grounded on the ego, it becomes fearless.



These first two factors—right view and right thought—constitute wisdom training.

The third factor is right speech. There are four aspects to right speech: abstaining from false speech, abstaining from harsh speech, abstaining from backbiting, and abstaining from useless speech. If you abstain from these four, you have right speech.

The fourth factor is right action, which consists of abstaining from killing, stealing, and sexual misconduct. We abstain from these three actions not only to nurture a good mind but also because of understanding the law of karma: every action has its reaction. The reaction comes back directly to the actor himself. For example, the action of killing results in one having a short life.

The fifth factor is right livelihood. For laypersons, there are only five livelihoods to abstain from: one should not deal in weapons, in intoxicants, in animals for slaughter, in poisons, or in the selling of humans, or slavery.

We abstain from misconduct to protect ourselves. Our ultimate protection is our own morality, which is our internal protection. Only when we abstain from all unwholesome deeds do we protect our own life as well as the lives of others. Morality training is basic humanity.

Right speech, right action, and right livelihood constitute morality training. This training helps us overcome our gross physical and verbal actions. The cause for the perfection of morality training lies in one's loving-kindness and compassion for others. Morality training is



the base for concentration training. Those who have morality training become fearless, free from self-reproach and remorse, and free from the reproach of others. They have self-confidence and serenity of mind. This is conducive to developing concentration.

The sixth factor is right effort. Many people think that right effort consists of sitting in meditation for a long time and enduring pain without changing posture. But that is only physical right effort. There are four types of right effort: effort to prevent unarisen evil from arising; effort to discard evil that has arisen; effort to arouse wholesome states that have not yet arisen; and effort to bring to perfection wholesome states that have already arisen.

The most effective way to prevent evil from arising is to guard the sense doors. All defilements come through the sense doors of the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind. Sensually enticing objects mostly come through the eye door. Abusive words or praise come through the ear door. Sweet tastes come through the tongue door, pleasant touch through the body door, etc. How does one guard the sense doors? This is done either by fixing one's mind on a concentration object such as one's breath or whatever technique one follows, or by being mindful of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, sensing, and thinking. Mindfulness not only cuts down discursive thoughts regarding the present objects, but also either prevents the mind from falling into past pleasant sensual experiences or longing for pleasant sensual experiences that have not yet occurred. Mindfulness takes in the actual



characteristics of the cognized objects and allows wisdom to understand the impermanence of all phenomena.

If evil thoughts have arisen, it is very important at that time to have right effort to discard them. Most people do not have this type of effort. They allow the negative emotions of anger, lust, fear, craving, jealousy, cruelty, etc., to overwhelm them. Being overwhelmed by these unskillful mental states, they act compulsively, either finding fault in others or beating themselves up. They become the victims of their defilements. Any such action will only hurt oneself and others. Later, when those negative emotions have gone, they may feel remorse over their actions to the extent of developing self-hatred. The vicious circle goes on when one has no right effort to discard evil that has arisen.

Buddha, when still an unenlightened Bodhisatta, related how he subdued the arising fear and dread through right effort. He said: “While I walked, the fear and dread came upon me; I neither stood nor sat nor lay down till I had subdued that fear and dread. While I stood, the fear and dread came upon me; I neither walked nor sat nor lay down till I had subdued that fear and dread. While I sat, the fear and dread came upon me; I neither walked nor stood nor lay down till I had subdued that fear and dread. While I lay down, the fear and dread came upon me; I neither walked nor stood nor sat down till I had subdued that fear and dread” (MN 4).

Without right effort, one cannot free oneself from suffering. Therefore, the effort to discard, dispel, and remove evil thoughts that have arisen in the mind at the



very moment they arise is crucial. When the defilements are left unchecked and uncontrolled, the defilements gain momentum and become extremely difficult to overcome. The force is further reinforced and becomes our second nature.

In the discourse on “The Removal of Distracting Thoughts” (MN 20), the Buddha describes five ways to remove evil thoughts that have already arisen:

1. When unwholesome thoughts connected with greed, hate, and delusion arise, one should give attention to the opposite mental state, connected with the wholesome. For example, when thoughts of hatred arise toward persons whom we do not like, a traditional way is to replace anger with thoughts of loving-kindness, wishing others to be well, happy, and peaceful, until the thought of anger subsides. This may prove difficult for many people, because of a lack of mastery over the mind.

If thoughts of loving-kindness fail, there are other ways to overcome anger. One can try to contemplate separating the object of anger into thirty-two parts. How? When one is angry with someone, what is it one is angry with? Is it the person’s head-hairs one is angry with? Or bones or snot? Or is it the person’s feces one is angry with? Alternatively, one can develop understanding of the body of the enemy as composed of the four elements: earth, water, fire, and wind. Is it the earth element in his body that one is angry with, or the water element, or the fire element, or the wind element? If one can regard the object of one’s anger in terms of the thirty-two parts or the four elements, and see that the object is not a being or



a person, one's anger gains no foothold, like a painting in the air.

2. If, however, one fails to achieve the objective by using this method, and unwholesome thoughts connected with greed, hatred, and delusion are still present in the mind, one can examine the danger in these thoughts: "These thoughts are unwholesome, they are reprehensible, and are productive of painful results for uncountable lifetimes according to the law of karma." For example, when getting angry, one should reproach oneself thus: "By getting angry, am I not like a man who wants to hit another and instead picks up a burning ember or piece of excrement and by doing so first burns himself or makes himself stink?" Or when the mind tenaciously grasps the sensually enticing form, one tries to remember what the Buddha said: "For if mind should stand tied to gratification in the delightful sign of form, and if one should die on that occasion, it is possible that one will go to hell or the animal realm."

3. If unwholesome thoughts continue to dominate the mind, one can try to forget and ignore these thoughts and not pay any attention to them by diverting one's attention to another matter. In meditation, sometimes we ignore discursive thoughts, and even physical pain can be ignored if we can focus on the breath intensively. Without reflecting and dwelling on discursive thought, the force of it will gradually diminish, and our mind will not be bothered.

4. If, however, unwholesome thoughts still do not subside, one can inquire into the cause of those



unwholesome thoughts. For example, when abusive words contact your ear, you feel angry. After the abusive words subside, you still hold the bitter feeling although there is no more ear-contact. Why is it so? If you can inquire into the cause, you will realize it is because we cling to and identify with the unpleasant feeling as “I” or “myself.” Then, let go of that cause of suffering—clinging and identification.

5. If unwholesome thoughts still linger in the mind, the Buddha gave the following advice: with teeth clenched and the tongue pressed against the roof of the mouth, one should beat down, constrain, and crush the unwholesome mind with the wholesome mind.

If one still fails to remove distracting thoughts of lust and hate, here I would suggest that you be mindful of or make a mental note of your mental states, seeing “a mind affected by anger as a mind affected by anger,” “a mind affected by lust as a mind affected by lust.” Do this a thousand times to the extent necessary for you to see that “there is only mind” without the perception of self. The clinging to and the identification with the defilements as “myself” is the greatest suffering that binds us. If the distracting thoughts of lust and hate have been dispelled, do not look on with indifference when they arise a second time; dispel them even if they arise a hundred times. Act so that no signs shall remain. Persistent effort is needed here.

Let us return to the third type of right effort, the effort to arouse a wholesome state that is not yet arisen. Those who have not undertaken morality training should



arouse the effort to do so by understanding its value. One also must arouse effort to practice concentration if one has not yet made any initial effort. Similarly one should arouse effort to practice insight if one hasn't yet attempted to do so.

The fourth type of right effort is the effort to develop and bring to perfection a wholesome state that has already arisen. This final effort is necessary to perfect our morality, to attain *jhāna*, and to experience different stages of insight, especially to see the arising and passing away of the five aggregates until the mind becomes disenchanted and finally liberated by not clinging to them.

The seventh factor is right mindfulness. It is remembering, or not forgetting, to practice the four foundations of mindfulness: contemplation of the body, contemplation of the different types of feeling (pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral), contemplation of different states of the mind (such as lustful mind, angry mind, contracted mind, distracted mind, etc.), and contemplation of mental qualities (*dharmas*) such as the five hindrances, the four noble truths, the seven factors of enlightenment, etc. Body, feeling, mind, and mental qualities serve as the foundations for the establishment of mindfulness, which arouses in us the wisdom to know body as body, feeling as feeling, mind as mind, and mental qualities as mental qualities. No abider, maker, originator, or experiencer can be found in them, only the ongoing process of cognition. And this process of cognition arises with causes and ceases when the causes cease.



The eighth factor is right concentration. It is collecting or unifying the mind, which means cultivating a state where all mental factors are brought together and intensified by directing them onto one particular object, such as the breath, continuously for a designated period of time. At this time, the mind is quite secluded from sensual pleasures and from the five hindrances and is accompanied by applied and sustained application of mind, with rapture and pleasure born of seclusion; this is abiding in the first *jhāna*. Right concentration means the first, second, third, and fourth *jhānas*. To attain second *jhāna*, one removes applied and sustained application of mind, while rapture and pleasure born of concentration remain. To reach third *jhāna*, one does away with rapture, leaving happiness and one-pointedness. Finally, with the abandoning of pleasure and pain, and with the previous disappearance of joy and grief, one enters the fourth *jhāna*, which has neither-pain-nor-pleasure and purity of mindfulness due to equanimity.

Concentration makes the mind wieldy, malleable and luminous. At such a time, if one directs one's mind to see one's own five aggregates as well as the external five aggregates of others, the nature of the five aggregates will appear as arising and vanishing constantly; being oppressed by the constant arising and passing away, one feels weary, and gets disenchanted by the whole process. One further understands the emptiness of the process. How can the process of constant arising and passing away have an enduring self?



Therefore, the Buddha repeatedly said: *"Develop concentration; one with concentration sees things as they really are."*

Right effort, mindfulness, and concentration together are known as the concentration training. While practicing mindfulness of breathing, one puts forth effort to be mindful of one's breath. When attention lapses, one tries to bring the mind back to the breath again and again. Because of repeated effort, the mind constantly stays with the breath. One does not forget the breath. Without forgetting the breath, mindfulness "sinks" into it. With application of effort and mindfulness in this way, one's mind gradually anchors and unifies on the breath and attains deep concentration. Working together in this way, right effort, mindfulness, and concentration fulfill the concentration training.

These three trainings—training in morality, concentration, and wisdom—are the same as the Noble Eightfold Path. This Noble Eightfold Path is the raft, that can help you cross the great expanse of water and reach the far shore---*Nibbāna*. Although this path is fulfilling, for most people the journey is very painful, like that of a snake shedding its dead skin. This is because the path of these three trainings goes against our habitual pattern of behavior ingrained in us for a long time. It is the path of constantly letting go of our belief, value, culture, view, craving, aversion, vanity, cleverness, etc. And the path—although it leads us to the far shore—is for treading, not for grasping.



Therefore, having found the raft, one still needs to apply effort to row the raft. In the sutta, the man, by means of that raft and making an effort with his hands and feet, safely crossed to the far shore. Making effort with hands and feet—this is a designation for the arousing of energy. The energy includes initial energy, intermediate energy, and persistent energy until the goal is achieved.

The story of Venerable Tissa will make clear these three types of energy. Tissa, the head of a family at Savatthi, after listening to the teaching of the Buddha, made use of initial energy to renounce his immense wealth and become a homeless one. He dwelled in the forest, practicing meditation relentlessly in solitude. This was his intermediate energy. His sister-in-law, worried that he might disrobe and take back the wealth, sent a band of 500 robbers to kill him.

The robbers, after entering the forest and searching for the elder, in due course came to the place in which he lived and sat around him. The elder spoke thus: “Lay disciples, why have you come?” They replied: “To kill you.” Then the elder said: “I will give you my promise, give me my life for just this one night.” Said the robbers: “O recluse, who will guarantee that you will stay in a place like this?” The elder, thereupon, took a big stone and broke the bones of his legs. Enduring his pain, he said: “Lay disciples, is this the assurance you need?” They, inspired by the elder's courage, leaving him alone, went to the end of the pathway and, lighting a fire, lay on the ground.



The elder contemplated on the purity of his conduct, arousing tireless energy. After suppressing his pain, persistent in his contemplation of the three characteristics of impermanence, suffering, and non-self, he attained *Arahantship* at dawn, having fulfilled the recluse's duty in the three watches of the night. This was his persistent energy. Giving expression to his feelings, he said:

*"A surety let me raise breaking both my legs:
To die with lustful mind I loathe and shrink.
Having thought thus I saw things as they are,
And with the dawn I reached the Arahant's domain."*

Coming back to the sutta, the man by means of that raft and making an effort with his hands and feet, safely crossed to the far shore, and going beyond, he stands on high ground. "The far shore, which is safe and free from danger" is a designation for *Nibbāna*. *Nibbāna* is the complete fading away and extinction of the craving that brings renewed existence; it is forsaking and abandoning craving, and liberation and detachment from it. *Nibbāna* is not self-annihilation, since there is no one to be annihilated.

Standing on high ground represents attainment of *Arahantship*. The word *Arahant* denotes the killer of all defilements. Forsaking lust, hatred, and delusion, truly knowing and with mind freed, the *Arahant* clings to nothing here and hereafter. Clinging to none, the *Arahant* has nothing to fear. Now the man feels safe and secure forever. He is endowed with absolute knowledge—the knowledge of the extinction of all suffering.



*For him who has completed the journey,
for him who is sorrowless,
for him for whom everything is wholly free,
for him who has destroyed all Ties,
Suffering exists not.*

Sadhu!Sadhu!Sadhu!

*Talks given during a Ten-Day Meditation Retreat in
Connecticut, U.S., 2010.*

Below is the original sutta from the Samyutta
Nikāya, in the Book of the Six Sense-Bases.

The Simile of the Vipers

"Bhikkhus, suppose there were four vipers of fierce heat and deadly venom. Then a man would come along wanting to live, not wanting to die, desiring happiness and averse to suffering. They would tell him: 'Good man, these four vipers are of fierce heat and deadly venom. From time to time they must be lifted up; from time to time they must be bathed; from time to time they must be fed; from time to time they must be laid to rest. But if one or another of these vipers ever becomes angry with you, then, good man, you will meet death or deadly suffering. Do whatever has to be done, good man!'

"Then, bhikkhus, afraid of the four vipers of fierce heat and deadly venom, that man would flee in one direction or another. They would tell him: 'Good man, five murderous enemies are pursuing you, thinking, "Wherever we see him, we will take his life right on the spot. "Do whatever has to be done, good man!'



"Then, bhikkhus, afraid of the four vipers of fierce heat and deadly venom, that man would flee in one direction or another. They would tell him: 'Good man, five murderous enemies are pursuing you, thinking, "Wherever we see him, we will take his life right on the spot. "Do whatever has to be done, good man!"'

"Then, bhikkhus, afraid of the four vipers of fierce heat and deadly venom, and of the five murderous enemies, that man would flee in one direction or another. They would tell him: 'Good man, a sixth murderer, an intimate companion, is pursuing you with drawn sword, thinking, "Wherever I see him I will cut off his head right on the spot. "Do whatever has to be done, good man!"'

"Then, bhikkhus, afraid of the four vipers of fierce heat and deadly venom, and of the five murderous enemies, and of the sixth murderer, the intimate companion with drawn sword, that man would flee in one direction or another. He would see an empty village. Whatever house he enters is void, deserted, empty. Whatever pot he takes hold of is void, hollow, empty. They would tell him: 'Good man, just now village-attacking dacoits will raid this empty village. Do whatever has to be done, good man!'

"Then, bhikkhus, afraid of the four vipers of fierce heat and deadly venom, and of the five murderous enemies, and of the sixth murderer—the intimate companion with drawn sword—and of the village-attacking dacoits, that man would flee in one direction or another. He would see a great expanse of water whose near shore was dangerous and fearful, and whose further shore was safe and free from danger, but there would be no ferryboat or bridge for crossing over from the near shore to the far shore.

"Then the man would think: 'There is this great expanse of water whose near shore is dangerous and fearful, and whose further shore is safe and free from danger, but



there is no ferryboat or bridge for crossing over. Let me collect grass, twigs, branches, and foliage, and bind them together into a raft, so that by means of that raft, making an effort with my hands and feet, I can get safely across to the far shore.'

"Then the man would collect grass, twigs, branches, and foliage, and bind them together into a raft, so that by means of that raft, making an effort with his hands and feet, he would get safely across to the far shore. Crossed over, gone beyond, the Brahmin stands on high ground.

"I have made up this miliesin, bhikkhus, in order to convey a meaning. This is the meaning here: 'The four vipers of fierce heat and deadly venom': this is a designation for the four great elements—the earth element, the water element, the heat element, the air element.

"'The five murderous enemies': this is a designation for the five aggregates subject to clinging; that is, the material form aggregate subject to clinging, the feeling aggregate subject to clinging, the perception aggregate subject to clinging, the volitional formations aggregate subject to clinging, the consciousness aggregate subject to clinging.

"'The sixth murderer, the intimate companion with drawn sword': this is a designation for delight and lust.

"'The empty village': this is a designation for the six internal sense-bases. If, bhikkhus, a wise, competent, intelligent person examines them by way of the eye, they appear to be void, hollow, empty. If he examines them by way of the ear...by way of the mind, they appear to be void, hollow, empty.

"'Village-attacking dacoits ': this is a designation for the six external sense-bases. The eye, bhikkhus, is attacked



by agreeable and disagreeable forms. The ear... The nose... The tongue... The body..... The mind is attacked by agreeable and disagreeable mental phenomena.

""The great expanse of water': this is a designation for the four floods: the flood of sensuality, the flood of existence, the flood of views, and the flood of ignorance.

""The near shore, which is dangerous and fearful': this is a designation for identity.

""The further shore, which is safe and free from danger': this is a designation for Nibbana.

""The raft': this is a designation for the Noble Eightfold Path; that is, right view... right concentration.

""Making effort with hands and feet': this is a designation for the arousing of energy.

""Crossed over, gone beyond, the Brahmin stands on high ground': this is a designation for the Arahant.





An Introduction To the Five Aggregates

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Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Samma-Sambuddhassa (x3)



Form

is like a large lump of foam.

Feeling

is like a water bubble.

Perception

is like a mirage.

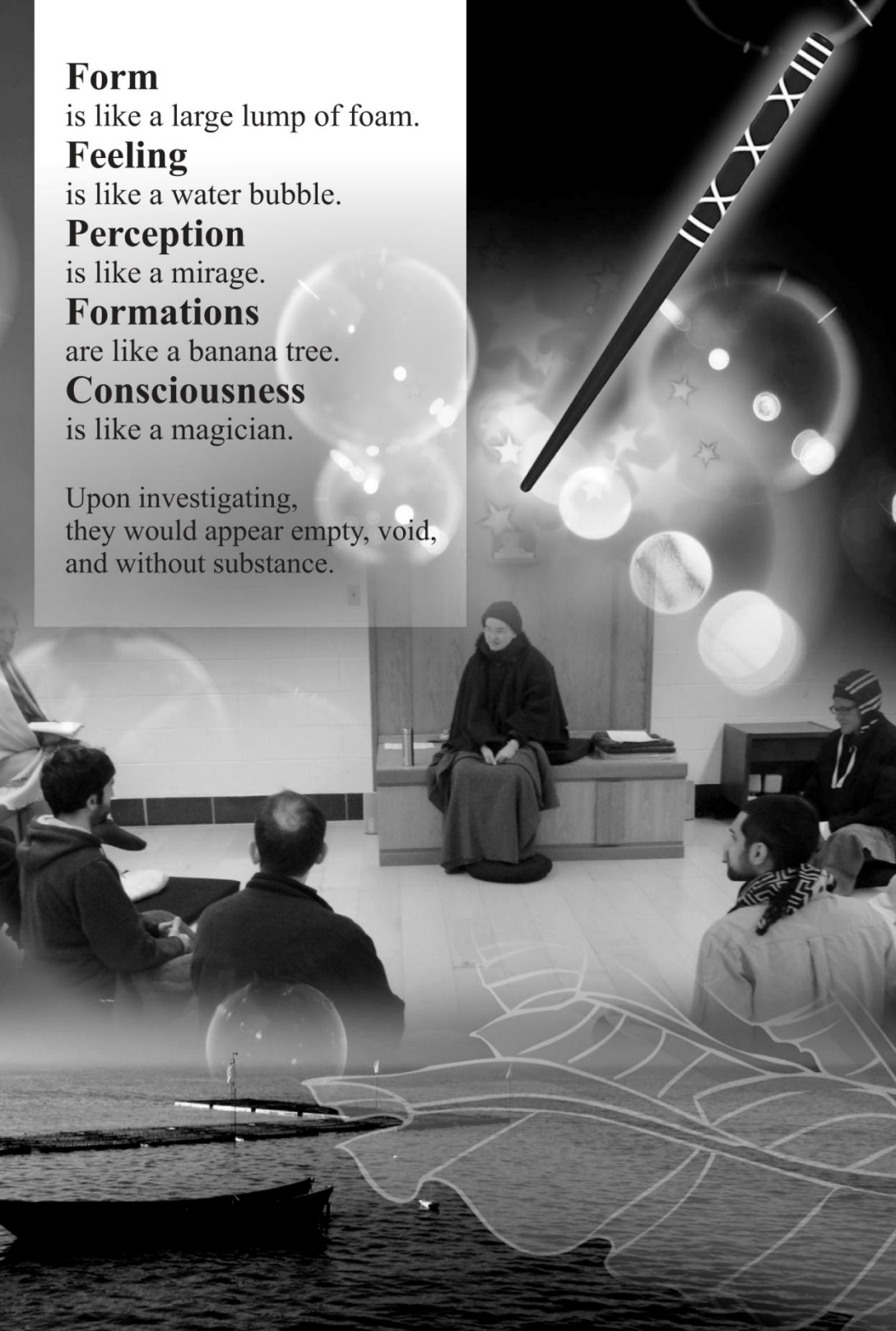
Formations


are like a banana tree.

Consciousness

is like a magician.

Upon investigating,
they would appear empty, void,
and without substance.





*Him I call a noble one,
who even in this existence realizes the end of dukkha,
who has laid down the burden of the aggregates,
and who is free from moral defilements.*

—Dhammapada 402—

Our main focus in this retreat will be the five aggregates. Let me start by asking you: *What are the five aggregates?* In short, the five aggregates are the materiality aggregate, feeling aggregate, perception aggregate, volitional formations aggregate, and consciousness aggregate.

In this world, there are two types of truth or reality. They are:



(1) conventional truth (*sammuti sacca*) and (2) ultimate truth (*paramattha sacca*). Conventional truth refers to ordinary concepts, such as “tree,” “house,” “table,” “man,” “woman,” “you,” “me,” “person,” “body,” “being,” etc. Such concepts are closely linked to our language, culture, and conditioning. Ultimate truth means something which exists by reason of its own intrinsic nature (*sabhāva*). The five aggregates are ultimate truth, and are the object of *vipassanā* meditation.

The difference between conventional truth and ultimate truth can be made clear by quoting a conversation between King Milinda and Arahant Nāgasena. King Milinda was a very good and famous debater, and he had the impression that the Buddha’s teachings were inferior because no Buddhist monks had ever been able to defeat him in debate. One day an elderly *mahathera*, who was an arahant, requested Arahant Nāgasena to have a debate with King Milinda, so King Milinda came to Arahant Nāgasena’s monastery and—after paying respect to him—asked, “Venerable sir, how do your fellow monks address you?”

Venerable Nāgasena replied, “My fellow monks address me as ‘Nāgasena.’ But ‘Nāgasena’ is not real. It does not exist at the level of ultimate truth.”

King Milinda seized the chance, “You said ‘Nāgasena does not exist.’ If that is the case, then who are you? Who is the one that sits in front of me, receives my bow, receives my homage, and receives my offerings of the four requisites?”



Arahant Nāgasena replied with a question, “King, how did you come to this temple?” King Milinda replied that he had come in a chariot.

Arahant Nāgasena continued, “Well then please show me your chariot. Is the horse that pulls the chariot, the chariot? Or the wheel of the chariot, the chariot? Or the carriage of the chariot, the chariot? Or the axle of the chariot, the chariot?”

King Milinda replied, “No, the horse is not the chariot, neither is the wheel, carriage, or axle the chariot.”

Arahant Nāgasena continued, “King, only just now, you said you came here in a chariot. And yet, you couldn’t give me a clear answer as to what a chariot is!”

King Milinda replied, “A chariot is made up of all the parts that you have mentioned. The combination of these parts forms a chariot.”

Then Venerable Nāgasena said, “Very good, your highness. The way you understand the chariot is the way you should understand me. In the same way as a chariot does not exist in ultimate reality, so too ‘Nāgasena’ does not exist as a self. What actually exists is only the five aggregates. ‘Nāgasena’ is just the combination of the materiality aggregate, the feeling aggregate, the perception aggregate, the formations aggregate, and the consciousness aggregate.”

The essence of this conversation between King Milinda and Venerable Nāgasena is simply to answer the question:



What makes up the “self”?

Who am I and what is my real “self”? Now you should be able to answer the question of what makes up the “self”!

The “self” is only a conventional truth. Penetrating the conventional truth with wisdom, one understands that the “self” is the combination of the five aggregates. We are living in conventional truth. Without relying on conventional truth, everything would be out of order. Conventional truth makes communication possible, and without it the world cannot function. However, one should not be shackled in the world of conventional truth, but go beyond it. This is because only the penetration of ultimate truth can liberate us from ignorance and allow us to attain true and lasting happiness.

Now let me ask you a second question: ***Why do we need to understand the five aggregates?***

We need to understand them because the five aggregates are the Noble Truth of Suffering (*Dukkha Ariya Sacca*). The entire teaching of the Buddha is centered on the Four Noble Truths, and the First Noble Truth—the Noble Truth of Suffering—is the five aggregates subject to clinging.

Without understanding the five aggregates subject to clinging, we cannot understand the Noble Truth of Suffering, and if we do not understand the truth of suffering, how can we expect to get rid of it? Suffering is called *dukkha* in Pāli. “*Dukkha*” is a compound word consisting of two syllables: “du,” which means “bad” and



“*kham*,” which means “void of happiness.” So “*dukkha*” is bad. Why is this so? This is because it is void of happiness. *Dukkha* also implies “difficult to endure” owing to “impermanence” and “emptiness.”

Dukkha can be explained in three ways:

1. *dukkha* as ordinary suffering (*dukkha-dukkha*),
2. *dukkha* owing to change (*viparināma-dukkha*),
and
3. *dukkha* as a conditional state (*sankhāra-dukkha*).

(1) *Dukkha-dukkha* refers to what most of us understand as ordinary suffering. It is the most obvious kind of suffering, that which is related to gross mental and physical pain. This body brings a lot of suffering if you are mindful enough to observe it. For example, if you are practicing sitting meditation for half an hour, pain will probably arise somewhere in the body. If you find the pain is too much to endure, you will need to change your posture. In a short time, another pain will arise in another part of your body. In order to continue your sitting meditation, you will need to keep changing your posture to cope with the pain. This is the physical aspect of *dukkha-dukkha*.

After one hour of sitting, you may decide to get up and practice walking meditation. However after walking for some time, you may also feel discomfort. If you engage in either practice continuously for one to two hours, the body will reveal to you various aches and pains, all of which are manifestations of *dukkha-dukkha*. Then you may decide to lie down. After lying down for a long time you will also feel that lying down is actually not



comfortable. Then you may decide to practice standing meditation. However, after doing this for some time, you may also feel pressure in the feet and stiffness all over the body—another form of suffering. Then you may decide to sit down again. No matter what the posture, if you maintain it long enough, the suffering nature of the physical body will invariably be revealed.

Why is it that in your ordinary life, you do not clearly see *dukkha* inherent in the body as you do during a meditation retreat? It is because we keep on changing postures. When there is even a little discomfort, we unconsciously change our posture, which makes the bodily pain disappear. During meditation, however, we are advised to keep the same posture without moving, and then the suffering nature of the physical body is revealed. This type of suffering is one aspect of what we call *dukkha-dukkha*.

(2) *Viparināma-dukkha* is suffering owing to change. It mainly refers to the change of pleasant feeling. The only unchanging thing in this world is change itself. Both mind and body are constantly changing, the main difference being that the mental aggregates change even faster than the material aggregate. For example, you may experience pleasant feelings at this moment because you had a good experience during your morning meditation, and a brilliant light appeared owing to deep concentration. You feel good and your faith increases; as a result, you believe that achieving *jhāna* is at hand. You begin the next sitting with great effort and expectation. However, this time not only is there no light, but your mind is also burdened with restlessness due to excessive



effort. Very quickly, your pleasant feelings change to unpleasant feelings and you end up feeling frustrated. You are now experiencing a kind of suffering that arises due to your attachment to the previous pleasant experience.

When we cling to a happy state and that state changes, we feel suffering in its place because of our attachment to that happiness. This is what we call suffering owing to change, *viparināma-dukkha*.

(3) *Sankhāra-dukkha* is suffering due to the changing nature of all conditioned existence. Sometimes you feel that your body is beyond your control. It ages and you become sick. Your emotions, happiness and sorrow, are also beyond your control. Whatever change takes place in the body and mind is beyond your control because the change is produced by causes, which are also beyond your control. When the weather is too hot, you suffer, so you may go into an air-conditioned room. After some time, you feel the temperature has become too cold for you, and this in turn is another type of suffering. In fact, there is not a single thing in the universe over which you have absolute control, since all conditioned things are in a state of constant change. That which is beyond your control causes fear and suffering.

At times, unable to cope with the hardships of life patiently without complaint, you feel disenchanting with your life. You may wish that you could just stop living, but somehow life keeps pushing you on. Since the causes that led to rebirth as a human being are not yet exhausted, you must bear the burden patiently. This is what we call suffering due to conditions, *sankhāra-dukkha*.



All this *dukkha*, regardless of whether it is *dukkha-dukkha*, *viparināma-dukkha*, or *sankhāra-dukkha*, comes from the five aggregates of clinging. The *dukkha-dukkha* arises based on clinging to the materiality aggregate; the *viparināma-dukkha* arises based on clinging to the mental aggregates; and the *sankhāra-dukkha* arises based on clinging to all the aggregates. That is why the five aggregates of clinging are called the Noble Truth of Suffering, *Dukkha Ariya Sacca*.

Let me go back to the second question: ***Why should we understand the five aggregates?***

We should understand them because these five aggregates are the objects of identity-view and clinging. We have a body, and we identify our body as “I.” Without having a body, how could we possibly identify it as “I”? Thus the materiality aggregate becomes the object of identity-view. We also cling to the body as “mine” with craving. And when we cling to the body as mine, we also cling to the view that we are the body. In fact, we cling to this identity-view as if our very life depended on it, and in a way it does. Thus, a vicious cycle is set in motion—body begets view, and view begets body.

The same is true of the other four aggregates (feeling, perception, volitional formations, and consciousness). Whenever we experience a pleasant feeling, we identify the pleasant feeling as “I.” We take this pleasant feeling as our “self.” When our eyes see something, we say, “Oh, I see!” When the ears hear something, we say, “I hear! I hear!” What actually happens during the hearing process is that a sound impinges on the



ear-sensitivity, and because of this contact, hearing-consciousness arises. This is the actual process. But without seeing this process clearly, we identify it as our “self” hearing a sound. In the same way, when we eat something, the food touches the tongue-sensitivity, and due to this contact, tongue-consciousness arises, knowing the taste. But without understanding this process, we immediately identify it as our “self” tasting the food. Thus, without seeing clearly, we grasp everything seen, heard, smelled, tasted, and sensed as our “self”; therefore, identity-view comes about.

Here I would like to quote from the discourse named *Ānanda* (SN 22.83). After listening to this discourse, Venerable Ānanda realized the Dharma and became a stream-enterer. In this discourse, the Venerable Punnamantliniputta said to the Venerable Ānanda :

"It is by clinging that the notion 'I am' occurs, not without it...And by clinging to what does the notion of 'I am' occur?" What do you think?

"It is by clinging to the five aggregates that the notion 'I am' occurs."

Or if we say it is by clinging to body and mind, we are simply referring to the ultimate reality of the five aggregates by using a conventional truth. It is by clinging to our body and mind that the notion "I am" occurs. Venerable Punnamantliniputta then proceeds to give the simile of a young woman, fond of wearing ornaments, who is standing in front of a mirror. Before the mirror, she will look at her facial image with clinging, not without clinging.



So there the notion of "I am" occurs because of clinging. Clinging to what? It is clinging to the five aggregates.

Venerable Punnamantliniputta continues, "Is the materiality aggregate impermanent or permanent?" and Venerable Ananda replies, "Impermanent, venerable sir." Theoretically, we know the body is impermanent. But when physical pain arises and we react with aversion to "our" physical pain, it is an indication that we have already forgotten about impermanence! When we feel good physically and there is an absence of pain, we also forget that happiness of the body is impermanent. We cling to physical happiness. So when physical happiness goes away, we suffer, because we grasp after it, not wanting it to go away. Why are we so forgetful? I believe it is because the perception of impermanence is not deeply imprinted in our mind. Clear perception of impermanence is the proximate cause for strong mindfulness. When the perception of impermanence is strong, the mindfulness of impermanence will also be strong.

You should investigate your own body to see if it is actually impermanent. Do not believe this just because the Buddha said it. Keep your attention on your body with complete mindfulness. From the moment you wake up, begin to observe your body. Initially you may feel groggy. Then after eating, continue to pay attention to your body. You will see that the state of your body has changed. With or without food, the body exhibits different states. When the mind is happy, the body feels light and robust. When the mind is sad, the body tends to feel heavy and rigid. If you continue to observe your body, you will see how your body changes according to the state of your mind. During



sitting meditation, when the mind is well-concentrated on the meditation subject, the body is erect and quiet. The concentrated mind holds the posture. However, when the mind is restless, the body tends to move here and there. Thus our body changes depending on food and the state of the mind. Since the body is constantly changing depending on the causes, how then can we posit a permanent self that is identical to the body? The materiality aggregate is indeed impermanent and without a self.

Similarly, Venerable Ānanda was asked about the feeling aggregates: “Is the feeling aggregate impermanent or permanent?”

“Impermanent, venerable sir,” replied Venerable Ānanda.

The feeling aggregate changes almost every moment. For example, when your eyes see your loved one, pleasant feelings arise. If this experience is followed by seeing an enemy, unpleasant feelings will follow. When the ears hear abusive words, unpleasant feelings arise. If this is followed by praise, the unpleasant feelings change to pleasant. When your tongue tastes food that you like, pleasant feelings arise, and similarly, when your tongue tastes food that you do not like, unpleasant feelings arise. So feeling is not only impermanent, but also conditioned by external factors.

Next, Venerable Ānanda was asked about the perception aggregate: “Is the perception aggregate impermanent or permanent?”



“Impermanent, venerable sir,” said Venerable Ānanda.

Our perception, like our feeling, keeps changing moment by moment. What you perceive now may be completely different from what you had previously perceived. For example, previously you may have perceived that money brings happiness. Due to that perception, you place a high value on money and try hard to accumulate more and more. As life goes on and you become old and sick, you realize that money cannot bring lasting happiness. That is why you have come here to practice the *Dharma*, in order to pursue true happiness, which is faultless and unconditioned.

Then Venerable Ānanda was asked about the formations aggregate: “Is the formations aggregate impermanent or permanent?”

“Impermanent, venerable sir,” said Venerable Ānanda.

The formations aggregate includes wholesome and unwholesome mental factors such as anger, jealousy, generosity, happiness, restlessness, concentration, wisdom, etc. Your desire and effort to meditate also change. At one time, you may practice with a great sense of urgency, at another time you may not want to sit at all. In the course of practice, you are sometimes mindful and sometimes not. When your concentration is good, you can sit for a long time without moving. At other times, your mind may be obsessed by hindrances, and you may feel like jumping up from the seat! There seems to be no consistency in the mind. This is the way things are.



Lastly, Venerable Ānanda was asked about the consciousness aggregate: “Is the consciousness aggregate impermanent or permanent?”

Venerable Ānanda replied, “Impermanent, venerable sir.”

There are six types of consciousness: eye-, ear-, nose-, tongue-, body-, and mind-consciousness. Each consciousness takes its respective object: form for the eye, sound for the ear, odor for the nose, taste for the tongue, touch for the body, and mental objects for the mind. When you walk into a restaurant, eye-consciousness sees the form of various dishes displayed, ear-consciousness hears the waiter greeting you, nose-consciousness smells the aroma of the food, tongue-consciousness tastes the deliciousness of the food, body-consciousness senses the softness of the seat, and mind-consciousness lingers on the pleasant and unpleasant feelings that arise in conjunction with the other consciousnesses. When you have finished eating, if the overall impression (perception) from the various sense-doors is pleasant (feeling), you may decide to come to the restaurant again (volitional formations), and your consciousness is privy to that decision.

Considering that consciousness can only take one object at a time, the flow of consciousness from one object to the other is so rapid that these different sense impressions seem to merge together into a single uniform presentation, similar to the rapid display of individual frames on a movie screen. The consciousness is arising and ceasing at every moment in succession. Only when the



mind is concentrated are we able to see the individual frames of our sense-door consciousnesses arising and passing away, one after the other, with such incredible speed.

Investigating these five aggregates, we find them constantly changing, one state giving way to the next. Their very nature is to change. Venerable Punnamantāniputta asked Venerable Ānanda to investigate these five aggregates to see their inherent nature of arising and passing away.

Arahant Punnamantāniputta further asked, “Is what is impermanent happiness or suffering?”

To this, Venerable Ānanda answered, “Suffering.”

We all agree that what is impermanent cannot bring happiness. Therefore, what is impermanent is also *dukkha*.

The Venerable Punnamantāniputta asked further, “Is what is impermanent, suffering, subject to change and destruction, fit to be regarded as ‘I,’ ‘me,’ and ‘mine’?”

“No, venerable sir,” answered Venerable Ānanda.

What is impermanent and subject to suffering cannot be regarded as a self. Thus, the five aggregates are not a self. If they are not a self, what are they? They are merely an ongoing process of cause and effect, nothing substantial, but a series of causal relationships.

In this discourse, Arahant Punnamantāniputta poses an important question that calls for our investigation.



“How does the notion of ‘I am’ occur?”

Let me summarize the reasons for studying the five aggregates:

1. Because the five aggregates are the Noble Truth of Suffering.
2. Because the five aggregates are the objects from which identity-view and clinging spring.
3. Because the five aggregates are the objects of investigation for gaining insight.

If one keeps on investigating the nature of the five aggregates with wisdom, one will eventually see that these five aggregates are arising and passing away continuously. As a result, one becomes disenchanted with the aggregates. Thus disenchanted, it becomes possible for one to let go of clinging to the five aggregates.

However, at present, we are still attached to our body and mind. Why is this so? It is because we have not yet seen the damage they can cause. We are just like a child who sees fireworks for the first time, becomes fascinated by the display, and develops an attachment to it. One day, however, he touches one of the fireworks and gets burnt. He begins to realize that fireworks are not only beautiful, but also dangerous. They are danger in disguise. He knows if he holds on to one of the fireworks, he may get seriously burned. For the sake of his safety and happiness, he starts to keep a distance from the fireworks. He has learned to let go of his attachment to fireworks. Now he looks at the fireworks dispassionately.



We are in a similar position to that child. Although we have been told many times that this body and mind are suffering (*dukkha*), we still cling to them. We need to be burned in order to let go of our clinging.

So how can we see the danger of the mind and body?

It is only through directly experiencing the constant arising and ceasing of the mind and body that their danger is revealed. This requires repeated mindfulness to the extent necessary for insight to arise, and this is the goal of *vipassanā* practice.

It is important for you to know the goal when you come to practice meditation. But this doesn't mean that you attach to the goal. Knowing the goal of the practice and attaching to the goal are two different things. You know clearly the goal, but in the course of the practice, you don't need to think about it. The practice is not just about wanting to sit down and see arising and passing away of the body and mind. If this is so, your meditation will end up in suffering, owing to expectation. In this practice, the *Dharma* will only reveal itself when one's insight is mature. If your insight has not matured enough to see the rapid arising and passing away, you just have to continue practicing. Patience leads to the achieving of the goal.

The process of practicing *vipassanā* can be compared to a hen hatching eggs. The hen has to sit on top of the eggs and make sure the eggs are well-covered and nurtured. Only then will the chicks break through the shell and hatch properly. Similarly, you must make sure your



practice is done properly and continuously. The progress will take its own natural course. I just want to remind you that the progress of the practice (the removal of the defilements such as covetousness, jealousy, selfishness, anger, lust, etc.) takes a long time. It may take five years, ten years, or twenty years before you can see that the defilements have worn away. Do not expect to see immediate results. Despite this, you must have the confidence that, as long as you are practicing, you will progress. Be delighted when seeing “minor defilements” wear away day after day. This practice can be compared to the experience of a carpenter looking at the handle of the axe that he works with every day. He only sees the impression of his thumbs; he does not know so much of the handle of the axe has worn away today, so much yesterday, so much earlier. But when it has worn away, the knowledge occurs that it has worn away. So it is with the practice.

THE FIVE AGGREGATES IN DETAIL

The Materiality Aggregate

The materiality aggregate in Pāli is called *rūpa-kkhandha*. *Rūpa* is derived from the word *ruppati*, which means to be deformed, disturbed, oppressed, and broken. All kinds of states that have the characteristics of being attacked or deformed come under the materiality aggregate. The materiality aggregate is also the base for all diseases. The meaning of *rūpa* is the continuous change of



materiality, oppressed and disturbed by adverse physical conditions. *Rūpa* consists of the four great elements: earth element, fire element, water element and wind element. Dependent upon these four elements, there are 24 types of derived materiality: for example, eye-, ear-, nose-, tongue-, and body-sensitivity, color, smell, taste, nutriment, etc. These are called derived materiality because they are derived from the four great elements. (For a more in-depth discussion of derived materiality, please refer to my book *Unravelling the Mysteries of Mind & Body Through Abhidhamma*.)

There are four causes for the arising of the four great elements: karma, consciousness, nutriment, and temperature. Karma means both our past and present action, and the present four elements are a product of past karma. Take our digestive fire in the stomach as an example. This digestive fire is part of the fire element, which is one of the four elements. Owing to some unwholesome past karma, the four elements, which are the products of that karma, may have a deficient fire element in a particular case. The deficiency of the fire element causes weak digestive fire in the stomach, and this can affect a person's health. This is how karma can impact the four great elements.

The four great elements are also produced by consciousness (*cittajarūpa*). For example, when you have the intention to walk, your intention produces the four elements, especially the wind element, that pushes your body to go forward. Wholesome and unwholesome mental states also affect the elements in the body. If your mind is in a wholesome state, such as radiating love and



compassion for all beings, then the wholesome mental state produces wholesome four elements, which energize your body. But if your mind is in an unwholesome state—for example, if it is associated with hatred—then that hatred mind-state produces four elements, especially the fire element, in excess in your body. The excessive fire element burns your body. Due to the excessive fire element, the wind element becomes excessive too. The wind element pushes your body and your whole body shivers because of anger. You can experience this yourself. This is how the mind-state affects the four elements in the body. With this understanding, for the sake of our health, we should always cultivate wholesome mental states to ensure good health.

The food you eat also affects the four elements in the body. If you consume wholesome food, it produces healthy four elements that make your body healthy and strong. On the other hand, if you eat junk food, this unhealthy food produces unhealthy four elements that affect your health.

The last cause for the arising of the four elements in the body is temperature. The external and internal temperatures affect the four elements in the body. For example, if the weather is very hot, the whole body becomes fiery and sweats. If the weather is too cold, the body becomes inactive and the skin cracks. As for the internal temperature, excessive intake of chili peppers makes the body very hot. On the other hand, the intake of ice cream cools down the temperature in the body. From here, you can clearly see that the body, which is merely the effect, reacts according to the adverse causes of past



karma, consciousness, nutriment, and temperature. The body is just a group of effects produced by causes. Therefore, the body is conditioned. Even though this is a theoretical understanding, it temporarily helps you to remove the wrong view of body as permanent self or self as being in the body.

The Feeling Aggregate

Feeling, perception, volitional formations, and consciousness are mental aggregates. There are three ways to study them: according to their characteristics, functions, and manifestations. The characteristic of feeling is “to be felt.” The function of feeling is to experience the desirable or undesirable aspect of the object. For example, during the eating process, when the favorable food touches your tongue-sensitivity and you feel pleasure, it is not you who feels pleasure. In your mental stream, there is one mental factor called feeling, and this mental factor at that moment performs its function of experiencing and enjoying the desirable aspect of the taste. Therefore, whenever you enjoy something agreeable, it is the mental factor of feeling that makes you feel pleasure. You must bear in mind that the mental factor of feeling enjoys the taste and gives you a pleasant experience; the mental factor of feeling is not “I,” not “he,” not “she,” and not “a person.” The function of the mental factor of feeling is just to experience the object.

Each object has its desirable or undesirable aspect. Who experiences it? “Feeling” experiences it. When you look at your loved ones, at that moment, feeling performs its function of experiencing the lovable aspect of your



loved one, and the manifestation of feeling is to make the associated mental states of perception, formations, and consciousness happy. The body also feels happy. Therefore, you feel good when looking at your loved ones. On the other hand, if your eyes see an enemy, unpleasant feelings arise and make the associated mental states and body unhappy. That's all. If you can understand how feeling plays its role, then you will not misperceive feeling as a self.

There are three types of feeling: pleasant feeling, unpleasant feeling, and neutral feeling. Where do these feelings come from? They come from contact or impingement.

There are six types of contact.

When the eyes see a visible object, that is called eye-contact.

According to Dependent Origination, when there is eye-contact, dependent on that contact, feeling arises: Since there is eye contact, there must be one type of feeling born from eye-contact. When sound impinges on the ear-sensitivity, this impingement is called ear-contact. When there's ear-contact, there must be one type of feeling born from ear-contact. The same goes for the other sense-contacts. When fragrant odor touches the nose sensitivity, dependent on the nose-contact, pleasant feeling born from nose-contact arises. Similarly, when a very bitter food touches your tongue-sensitivity, owing to this tongue-contact, there arises unpleasant feeling experiencing the undesirable aspect of the taste. Likewise, when the body touches soft silk, due to this bodily contact,



there arises pleasant feeling. When you think of something pleasurable, then pleasant feeling arises due to mind-contact; when you think of something not pleasurable, unpleasant feeling arises. The neutral feeling arises when the contacts with the six sense-objects are neutral.

Therefore, we have pleasant, unpleasant or neutral feelings with regard to each contact. Since there are six contacts, there are eighteen types of feelings. When one practices contemplation of feelings, these eighteen types of feelings are the object of one's contemplation.

If we miss contemplating the feeling—for example, the pleasant feeling that arises from eating—attachment or craving follows the pleasant feeling. According to the formula of Dependent Origination and through our own practical experience, depending on pleasant feeling, craving arises. Suppose we experience a very pleasant feeling when tasting a piece of chocolate cake, and depending on this pleasant feeling, we reach out with our hand to grasp another piece. This is a sign of craving, is it not? We will also identify feelings as “I” or “myself” and give in to identity-view. In the practice to attain stream-enterer (*sotāpanna*), we have to get rid of identity-view by contemplating “feeling as feeling.” Therefore, if we are not mindful of pleasant feeling, two defilements—craving and identity-view—will follow.

This understanding reminds us to be contemplative. The six contacts of eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind are always open, except when we fall asleep. Since these six contacts are always there, it means these six types of feelings are also always present. Therefore,



feeling is always there to be observed. If there is no pleasant or unpleasant feeling, there will be a neutral feeling. Just observe the neutral feeling and see how it changes.

The Perception Aggregate

The characteristic of perception is that it perceives the quality of an object. Each object has its own quality. The function of perception is that it makes a sign regarding those qualities to enable recognition of the object. For example, how do you recognize a bird flying in the sky? You recognize it from its two wings, which are a sign or a characteristic of a bird that has been imprinted on your mind. The manifestation of perception is the action of interpreting one's experience by means of signs one has observed. We always perceive in a distorted way, just like the blind man who touches the elephant. The blind man cannot see the elephant as a whole. If he touches one part of the elephant, such as the leg, he may conclude that the elephant is like a pillar. This is the sign which the blind man misapprehends and mistakenly imprints in his memory. This sign is a distorted sign, which is not in accordance with the truth. The elephant's leg is only one part of the elephant; it is not the totality or the complete picture of the elephant.

Many of us, on seeing a coil of rope at night, would perceive it to be a snake and get frightened. This is called perverted or distorted perception. Perception perceives what is wrong as right or vice-versa. When can we see a rope as a rope? Only when there is light.



Under the influence of ignorance, the darkness of the mind, we perceive the five aggregates as permanent, happiness, and self; this is similar to the situation when we see a coil of rope and mistake it for a snake. When wisdom arises, we clearly see the true nature of the five aggregates. Perception is grouped under the five aggregates because of its importance. Thought and view follow what one perceives.

The Buddha repeatedly said that all formations are impermanent, but we still perceive otherwise owing to the deep imprint of distorted perception in life after life. Once the phenomenon is wrongly perceived, it takes great effort and a long time to correct it. That's why, no matter how many times we have been taught that all things are impermanent, impermanent, impermanent, we still forget.

Look at our own experiences. Take feeling as an example: since our birth until now, our feelings have changed constantly from pleasant to unpleasant or from unpleasant to neutral and vice-versa. Before you were married, you felt excited about your beloved. After marriage, the feelings may not be as pleasant as before. Sometimes you may even harbor bad feelings towards your spouse. You experience the instability of feelings as life unfolds. But why is your perception of impermanence still shaky? This is caused by latent ignorance and the failure to contemplate impermanence when actually experiencing change. Every time your feelings change, if you could contemplate them accordingly, then the perception of impermanence will be enhanced. Through the reinforcement, it becomes habit. As contemplating



impermanence becomes a mental habit, we will look upon happiness and sorrow as passing clouds in the sky.

Whatever arises, just contemplate arising and passing away repeatedly until your mind set matches this reality of impermanence. Then, nothing will move you; you will not be disturbed by any circumstances. Whatever happens to you, whether it be praise or blame, fame or defame, gain or loss, happiness or suffering, you remain unmoved because you know that all will change, so why attach? Happiness arises and passes away, sorrow arises and passes away, our prosperity may not last long, and that newly-bought Mercedes may get banged. So why attach? It is better to take “impermanence” as your refuge. If the perception of impermanence is strong in the mindset, then one can maintain equanimity all the time. One single contemplation of impermanence frees oneself from grasping in that moment. Practice moment to moment, day after day, year after year, until there comes a day when the mind is completely free from clinging to anything whatsoever, then you achieve freedom of the heart.

The Formations Aggregate

The characteristic of formations is forming, fabricating or constructing. The Buddha said: “They form the form, bhikkhus, this is why they are called formations.” According to the *Abhidhamma*, excluding feeling and perception, the rest of the 50 mental factors are termed as formations. These mental factors include craving, jealousy, mindfulness, effort, concentration, avarice, sloth and torpor, restlessness, faith, tranquility,



desire, determination, doubt, wisdom, hatred, delusion etc. The function of formations is to accumulate karma, whether it is through bodily, verbal, or mental action. Whatever actions one performs, whether they are rooted in greed, hatred, and delusion or non-greed, non-hatred, and non-delusion, they are termed karma. Once karma is performed, it leaves behind potency, or an energy that can produce effect. Karma can be likened to a seed: when you throw a seed onto the ground, it has the potential to sprout. Similarly, whatever action we do has the potency to produce an effect. It is called karmic potency, a phenomenon which cannot be seen by the eye.

The manifestation of formations occurs as a result of one's intervening or controlling due to becoming interested in an object. For example, when you are mindful of your breath, it is a formation because your mind is interested in this breath. You accumulate karma, which in this case, is good karma. Practicing *samatha* is always good karma since the mind is absorbed in a pure object. However, this type of karma prolongs your life in the round of rebirths if you stop short and do not proceed to insight.

Vipassanā is different. In *vipassanā* practice, whatever object arises, you contemplate impermanence, suffering, and non-self. The mind does not become interested or engaged; instead, the mind turns away from engaging in that object. This turning away from the object or non-clinging cuts short the round of rebirths.

We have mundane activity and supra-mundane activity. In mundane activity, volition is the leader because



it accumulates *karma*. In supra-mundane activity, wisdom is the leader because wisdom is like a sword that cuts off the defilements that produce rebirth.

The condition for the arising of the feeling, perception, and formations aggregates is contact.

The Consciousness Aggregate

Consciousness has the characteristic of knowing an object. The function of consciousness is to be the forerunner of mental factors, although they arise together. The manifestation of consciousness occurs as a continuity of process rather than as an independent being experiencing the phenomena.

For example, while watching a TV program, you may eat ice cream and rock your legs. There are several actions here: eye-consciousness arises on seeing the form on the screen; ear-consciousness arises on hearing the sound; tongue-consciousness arises on tasting the ice cream; nose-consciousness arises on smelling the fragrance of the ice cream; body-consciousness arises on sensing the shake of the legs; and mind-consciousness interprets what the program shows. These six consciousnesses arise one after another, in succession, not all at once. But we think they arise all at once because we fail to see the rapid arising and passing away of each discrete consciousness. In a snap of the fingers, millions of consciousnesses arise and pass away.



Therefore, as we watch TV, different consciousnesses arise one after another in rapid succession. Unable to understand the actual process, we conclude seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, sensing, and thinking as “myself.” We wrongly think, “I am eye-consciousness,” “I am ear-consciousness,” “I am mind-consciousness”; we think, “these six consciousnesses are mine.” The six consciousnesses arise one after another as a continuity of process, but we think it is a single continuous consciousness we identify as “I” that is experiencing the watching of the TV program. That’s why the Buddha said consciousness is like a magician, deceiving us. A magician can create something unreal and we believe it.

Consciousness is dependently arisen. Consciousness is named by the particular condition dependent upon which it arises. When consciousness arises dependent on the eye and forms, it is reckoned as eye-consciousness; when consciousness arises dependent on the ear and sounds, it is reckoned as ear-consciousness; when consciousness arises dependent on the nose and odors, it is reckoned as nose-consciousness; when consciousness arises dependent on the tongue and flavors, it is reckoned as tongue-consciousness; when consciousness arises dependent on the body and tangibles, it is reckoned as body-consciousness; when consciousness arises dependent on the mind and mind objects, it is reckoned as mind-consciousness.

In summary, we have six types of consciousness: eye-consciousness, ear-consciousness, nose-



consciousness, tongue-consciousness, body-consciousness, and mind-consciousness.

For each consciousness to arise, its conditional factors must be fulfilled. For example, for eye-consciousness to arise, four factors are needed: eye-sensitivity, light, attention, and form. When the cause of seeing is fulfilled, the effect of seeing arises. It is the same for other types of consciousness. None of the consciousnesses is “I,” “he,” “she,” or a “person.” This is the correct view.

THE GRATIFICATION OF THE FIVE AGGREGATES

The Gratification of the Materiality Aggregate

The form that is derived from the primary elements gives rise to excitement, enjoyment, satisfaction, and brings gratification to the eyes. For example, when one has nothing to do at home, there is a tendency to switch on the TV. That is because the various forms projected by the TV satisfy the eyes. This is enjoyment of the eyes.

How about sound? Some people are fond of music: classical, rock and roll, etc. Others like to hear sweet and pleasing talk such as praise from other people, although sometimes it may not be true. Music and pleasant words give satisfaction, enjoyment, and excitement to the ears.

The nose likes a fragrant odor, and this makes the Paris fragrances sell well in the world. A fragrant odor gratifies the nose and gladdens the mind.



The same is true of taste. Taste is also a derived materiality. Various tastes excite the taste buds. If we eat the same type of food every day, very soon we will get bored. That's because just one type of taste is not able to satisfy the tongue. The variety of foods gives rise to different excitement, enjoyment, and satisfaction for the tongue. And various restaurants are established to satisfy our needs.

The soft touch—the touch of fine cloth or the touch of one's partner—gives rise to excitement and brings gratification to the body. It is precisely owing to this feeling of ecstasy generated from the touch of one's partner that craving arises again and again.

In short, the pleasure and joy that arise dependent on the five internal bases and their respective five external objects are the gratification of the materiality aggregate.

The Gratification of the Feeling Aggregate

The feeling aggregate, especially pleasant feeling, gives more enjoyment than the materiality aggregate. Some people get addicted to alcohol, drugs, morphine, and other addictive substances, not because of their taste, but because these things stimulate a strong pleasant feeling. These people are addicted to the pleasant feeling that the drugs provide. This pleasant feeling thrills both mind and body.

So, this explains the enjoyment, gratification and excitement of the feeling aggregate.



The Gratification of the Perception Aggregate

We always perceive all formations as permanent, happiness, and self. This distorted perception makes the mind happy. Most people perceive worldly life as full of happiness. Being surrounded by our loved ones is joyful; enjoying the wealth one gains is happiness. Such a way of perceiving things satisfies us, and we cannot bear to renounce everything and become monks or nuns.

The perception of self satisfies the majority. Few can bear to perceive the mind and body as not a self. We do not like to hear that our property and loved ones do not belong to us because the concepts of no “self” and no “mine” threaten our ego-cherishing attitude.

The Gratification of the Formations Aggregate

Craving, one of the mental factors among the formations aggregate, finds great enjoyment in sensual pleasure. Craving has the characteristic of grasping the sensual object; its function is not to let go. The more one indulges in sensual pleasure, the more one's craving increases. We crave for existence, life after life. Many different good karmas are performed, which results in the continuation of life through many cycles of birth and death.

The Gratification of the Consciousness Aggregate

We are free to think whatever we want. Let us take, for example, the situation of a poor person. A poor person may not have a big house or a Mercedes, but he can dream of them. Nobody can stop him from dreaming. He might



even think he is now the President of the United States. He indulges in his own thoughts, an action which satisfies him. His thoughts make him happy.

Consciousness sustains life by being aware of some object. The very thought, "I am aware, thus still alive," gratifies the majority. This is called the gratification of the consciousness aggregate.

As the five aggregates provide gratification and enjoyment, we cling or attach to them tenaciously. If the five aggregates did not provide enjoyment, satisfaction, or happiness, how could we cling to them? Owing to their gratification, we just keep running and revolving around form, around feeling, around perception, around volitional formations, and around consciousness. As we keep on running and revolving around them, we are not freed from form, not freed from feeling, not freed from perception, not freed from volitional formations, and not freed from consciousness. We are not freed from suffering (SN 22.99).

The gratification, enjoyment, and excitement of the five aggregates cause us to be blind to their dangers and faults.

The *Magandiya Sutta* (MN 75) narrates the following incident: A man was born blind and could not see colors, whether pink, green, black, or white. He could not see the moon, the sky, or the sun. However, one day, he heard a man with good eyesight say, "How wonderful, good sir, is a white shirt or white cloth, beautiful, spotless, and clean." And this blind man went in search of something white because after hearing somebody praising the white, spotless, clean shirt or cloth, he developed a



strong attachment to this white shirt, although he could not see. One of his friends fooled him with a grimy and oil-stained cloth or rag and told him: “Here my good friend, is a white shirt, beautiful, spotless, and clean.” This blind man was so happy. He quickly took it and put it on. Having put it on, he felt gratified, satisfied, and happy. He went around showing off to other people. All of his friends laughed at him. One of his good friends told the blind man that he was wearing a grimy and oil-stained shirt, but the blind man still declared that he was wearing a white, clean, spotless shirt. His good friend thought that he should tell the blind man’s mother. His mother tried to convince her son that he was wearing a grimy and oil-stained shirt. However, as her blind son was so attached to this shirt that he thought was white, clean, and spotless, he did not believe her. His mother had no choice but to call for an eye doctor to cure his blindness. When he finally gained his eyesight and looked at his body, he found that it was not a white, clean, and spotless shirt that he cherished, but a grimy and oil-stained shirt. He exclaimed to himself, “Oh my gosh! How long have I been fooled, cheated, and deceived by that man and this grimy, oil-stained rag!” He quickly took it off and thought that the man who had fooled him should be killed.

What is this oil-stained, grimy, and dirty shirt? It is none other than the five aggregates that we all are showing off to other people. We think, “How fit and beautiful is my body!” Instead, we should say, “How beautiful is my oil-stained rag!” Why did this blind man develop such strong attachment to this oil-stained and grimy shirt? Because he was blind and could not see (ignorance). Don’t laugh at this blind man; we are in the



same boat. Due to ignorance, we cannot see the fault of the five aggregates. We think that the five aggregates provide us with enjoyment, gratification, and happiness. We are just like the blind man who perceived the grimy shirt as beautiful, clean, and spotless. That's why we cling strongly to the five aggregates. Only when wisdom arises, will ignorance give way. Then we start to see clearly the fault and the reality of the five aggregates. Then we will say, "My gosh, how long have I been fooled, cheated, and deceived by this mind!"

One realizes that whatever in the world one might cling to, it is just materiality that one is clinging to; it is just feeling, just perception, just formations, and just consciousness that one is clinging to (SN 22:79). It is precisely the gratification that the five aggregates stimulate that makes one cling to them.

The Danger of the Five Aggregates

Each coin has two sides. The five aggregates give gratification, but there is also danger in them. The danger of the five aggregates is that they are impermanent and subject to destruction. We may cling to our five aggregates, but once they change, the craving is no more satiated; then we feel misery. For example, we cling to our body, delusively thinking that our body is healthy and strong. One day when we go for a check-up and the diagnosis indicates that we have cancer; we won't be able to take joy in the body anymore. We will find that our previous perception of the body as a source of happiness now turns out to be the opposite. The body is giving us



suffering now. This is the danger of the material aggregate.

The mental aggregates of feeling, perception, formations, and consciousness change faster than the material aggregate. Within a single day, thousands of thoughts arise and pass away. Our cherished happiness soon leaves us and is replaced by sorrow; the praise we receive today becomes tomorrow's blame.

The danger of the five aggregates is that they are impermanent. What is impermanent is suffering. What is impermanent or suffering cannot be regarded as “I,” “mine” or “myself.” The process of change is beyond our control. Therefore, the five aggregates are not-self. What is non-self and beyond our control cannot bring us lasting happiness. This is the danger of the five aggregates.

The danger of the five aggregates could also be compared to a murderer who has disguised himself as a faithful servant of a rich man. The servant served the rich man very well, rising up before him, retiring after him, and doing whatever he wanted. He was agreeable in his conduct and endearing in his speech. Eventually, the rich man considered him a friend and placed trust in him. However, when the servant became aware that the rich man had placed trust in him, finding him alone, he took his life with a sharp knife (SN 22.85).

Our five aggregates are compared to a murderer living closely with us, though we may not recognize him. Our five aggregates serve us and please us well. We become very intimate with our five aggregates and place



trust in our five aggregates. When attachment to the five aggregates grows strong, we will then be killed.

The Escape

We have spoken about the gratification and dangers of the five aggregates, but how do we escape from the dangers?

The escape lies in removing the lust, the attachment, the craving, and the clinging to the five aggregates.

To achieve this goal, we must see the five aggregates as they are: *impermanent, suffering, and non-self*. Without seeing their impermanent, suffering, and non-self nature, we are unable to remove our lust for them. We are just like that child who is fascinated by fireworks; only when the child touches the fireworks and gets burned will he know that fireworks are dangerous and he must let go of his clinging to them.

The Materiality Aggregate

The Buddha compared the materiality aggregate to a lump of foam. He said: *“Monks, suppose that this river Ganges was carrying along a great lump of foam; a man with good sight would inspect it, ponder it, and carefully investigate it, and this lump of foam would appear to him to be void, hollow, insubstantial, for what substance could there be in the lump of foam? So, too, monks, whatever kind of form there is, whether past, future, or present, internal or external, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near, a monk inspects it, ponders it, and carefully investigates it, and it will appear to him to be void, hollow, insubstantial,*



for what substance could there be in a lump of foam?" (SN 22.97).

So if we inspect and investigate our body through four elements meditation, we will see clearly that the body is insubstantial. *How do we practice the four-elements meditation?*

We can scan the body: From the top of the head slowly scan down to the feet. In whatever part we feel hardness, mentally we should note "earth element, earth element." If we feel hot somewhere, then mentally note "fire element, fire element." Move the awareness from the top of the head down to the soles of the feet repeatedly. If we feel softness in any part of the body, we should note "earth element, earth element." When awareness reaches the heart and we feel the heart pumping, then we contemplate it as wind element and note, "wind element, wind element." Sometimes we might feel the tightness of the body—this is the water element. Contemplate "water element, water element." As we move our awareness from the top of the head down to the feet, we will see various elements in our body. As concentration grows, we will come to a stage when we no longer feel the body, only the elements. The elements will manifest very fast, appearing and disappearing, up to the final stage when we will no longer see elements, but will only see particles—billions of particles arising and passing away in the body. Some will see the body breaking up and falling apart. At this time, we will understand why the Buddha compared the materiality aggregate to foam. The body is like a lump of foam. For what substance could there be in this body? It is insubstantial.



The Feeling Aggregate

The Buddha compared the feeling aggregate to a water bubble. Water bubbles arise and burst on the surface of the water constantly. We can observe this when it rains and the water falls into a pond. If we investigate our feelings from moment to moment, we will come to the conclusion that feelings are just like water bubbles, insubstantial. For what substance could there be in a water bubble? It forms and perishes immediately. Similarly, our feelings—whether pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral—come and go.

The Perception Aggregate

The Buddha compared the perception aggregate to a mirage. During the hot season, sometimes we see that a mirage appears. We think it is real, but in fact it is unreal. Similarly our perception, like a mirage, deceives us. It makes us think what is impermanent, suffering, and non-self is permanent, happiness, and with an enduring self. By constantly contemplating phenomena as they truly are—as impermanent, suffering, and non-self—we would be able to correct our distorted perception.

The Formations Aggregate

The Buddha compared the formations aggregate to a banana tree. Take the case of a man who goes in search of heartwood and finds a banana tree. Wanting to get the heartwood, he cuts down the banana tree. As we know, the trunk of the banana tree is composed of several layers,



just as the formations aggregate is composed of many wholesome and unwholesome mental factors. This man peels away the layers of the tree but he won't find even soft wood, not to mention heartwood. This signifies that all mental formations are empty; there is no core and substance in them. The mental factor of mindfulness is empty of a self, the mental factor of wisdom is empty of a self, the mental factor of concentration is empty of a self, the mental factor of effort is empty of a self, and the mental factor of greed is empty of a self. There is no core in the formations aggregate. Knowing thus, one will not identify any mental factor as an abiding self.

The Consciousness Aggregate

The Buddha compared the consciousness aggregate to a magician. A magician can make something unreal appear as real, and make us believe in it and delight in it. As a consequence of this, we delight in our thoughts, thinking that they are real. Therefore, consciousness or our mind always fools us. Just like the blind man who thought that the grimy cloth was a clean cloth, we think that the five aggregates are permanent and bring happiness and enjoyment; thus, we are cheated by our mind.

How should we contemplate that the five aggregates are insubstantial in order to remove the lust for the five aggregates?

The answer can be found from Venerable Sariputta's reply to Maha Kotthita (SN 22.122). Venerable Sariputta explained: *"The appropriate way a practitioner should attend to the five aggregates of clinging is to regard the five*



aggregates as impermanent, unsatisfactory, a disease, a cancer, an arrow, painful, an affliction, alien, a dissolution, empty, void, not a self. Should a practitioner attend in this way, it is possible for the practitioner to realize the fruit of a stream-enterer, once-returner, non-returner, and finally an Arahant.”

As a practitioner attends to the five aggregates of clinging as impermanent, unsatisfactory, a disease, a cancer, an arrow, painful, an affliction, alien, a dissolution, empty, void, not a self, he does not delight in the five aggregates, does not welcome them, does not remain holding on to them. As a consequence of this, delight in the five aggregates ceases. With the cessation of delight comes the cessation of clinging; with the cessation of clinging comes the cessation of existence; with the cessation of existence comes the cessation of birth; with the cessation of birth, aging and death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, displeasure, and despair cease to be.

Such is the cessation of this whole mass of suffering.

THE IMPORTANCE OF RIGHT VIEW

Channa Bhikkhu's Dilemma

I would like to teach another profound sutta, the *Kaccayanagotta Sutta* from *Samyutta Nikāya*, as it is connected to your practical experience. Let me tell you the background of the *sutta* first, concerning Channa Bhikkhu.



One day, Channa Bhikkhu was meditating. After emerging from seclusion, he went to the eldest monk and asked the eldest monk to preach the *Dharma* to him. The eldest monk preached to him thus: form is impermanent, feeling is impermanent, perception is impermanent, volitional formations are impermanent, and consciousness is impermanent. Moreover, the five aggregates are also non-self. It was a very short *Dharma* talk.

Channa Bhikkhu bowed to the eldest monk and went back to his *kuti*. There he sat meditating. He thought to himself, "I understand form is impermanent, feeling is impermanent, perception is impermanent, volitional formations are impermanent, and consciousness is impermanent. I also understand they are non-self. However, my mind does not understand the stilling of all formations, the relinquishing of acquisition, and the destruction of craving. My mind does not understand the cessation, the fading away, and *Nibbāna*. Instead, agitation and clinging arise in me and my mind turns back. Who am I? Who am I? Who is myself sitting here meditating?" And he thought that such a doubt would not have arisen in one who has seen the Dharma. He wondered, "Who can show me the path? Who can help me see the Dharma?"

I would like to explain Channa's doubt. Channa understood that the five aggregates are impermanent and he also understood that the five aggregates are non-self. But why did such a doubt arise in him? Why did agitation and clinging arise in him? You may face the same problem.

The commentary on this sutta states that doubt arose in Channa because his insight knowledge was very



weak. Why was his insight knowledge weak? That was because before he proceeded to contemplate the impermanent and non-self nature of the five aggregates, he did not fully discern **cause and effect**. He did not fully discern the conditional five aggregates. Due to the fact that he did not fully discern the conditional five aggregates, although he knew that the five aggregates are non-self, he still had doubt: “Who am I? Who is myself? Who is this self sitting here meditating?”

This is the reason why on the first and second day, I taught you how to discern *nāma rūpa*, mind and matter, and cause and effect. Only then did I ask you to contemplate impermanence. If you do not contemplate cause and effect, but instead you go one step further to contemplate non-self, you will end up with Channa’s dilemma. You will have doubt and perplexity about this self and about yourself. Although Channa understood the impermanent and non-self nature of the five aggregates, his mind did not understand the stilling of all formations and *Nibbāna*. Instead, agitation arose in him. This agitation arose in Channa because of fear. Fear of losing this self.

For some meditators, finding no “self” but only the elements when practicing the four-elements meditation, they weep with sorrow. That’s because of fear. They are afraid of losing the “self” which they have clung to so firmly and so strongly.

Where does this fear come from, what is its cause?
Such fear is caused by the clinging to the self.



Agitation and clinging—agitation out of fear and clinging to the self—will block the meditator’s progress. The mind will refuse to incline towards cessation or the stilling of all formations. Remembering this will be very helpful to your practice. You will come to this stage.

In order to overcome the difficulty or dilemma of Channa, **you have to contemplate mind and matter, cause and effect**, again and again. When you are able to contemplate cause and effect, the non-self nature will become clearer and clearer to you. I have already mentioned the four causes for the arising of materiality: karma, consciousness, nutriment, and temperature. You must not neglect the contemplation of cause and effect, called *paccaya pariggaha ñana* or the “second insight knowledge of discerning cause and effect.”

The Views of Eternalism and Annihilationism

When this doubt and perplexity arose in Channa, he thought Venerable Ānanda might be able to help him. Ānanda was praised by the Buddha for his wisdom and knowledge, and he listened to all the teachings of the Buddha. He approached Venerable Ānanda and told him his difficulties. Ānanda preached him a very profound sutta, the *Kaccayanagotta Sutta*. Venerable Ānanda said: “*This world for the most part, relies on duality or polarity, upon the notion of existence and non-existence. For one who sees the origination of the world as it actually is with correct wisdom, the notion of non-existence will not occur in him. For one who sees the cessation of the world, the notion of existence will not occur in him.*” (SN 12.15)



The notion of existence is the same as the view of eternalism. The notion of non-existence is the same as the view of annihilationism. In this world, most people get entangled in these dualities or views. Why does a person hold on or cling to the view of eternalism? That's because this person does not see the repeated cessation of formations. Therefore, during your vipassanā practice, it is essential to see the repeated passing away of formations to get rid of the view of eternalism.

How did the view of annihilation come about? Why do people think that after death, everything is annihilated? That's because they do not see the arising or the origination of the formations. "Formations" here signifies the world of conditions (*sankhāra*). **The five aggregates are the world of conditions.** If a person does not see the origination, the formation, or the arising again and again of the five aggregates, then he will hold the view of annihilationism. The Buddha said the notion of non-existence will not occur in one who sees the origination of the five aggregates as they actually are with correct wisdom.

"Everything exists" is one extreme. "Nothing exists" is another extreme.

The Buddha avoided these two extremes and preached the middle way: dependent on ignorance, karmic formations come to be; dependent on karmic formations, consciousness comes to be; dependent on consciousness, mind and matter come to be; dependent on mind and matter, six sense-bases come to be; dependent on six sense-bases, contact comes to be; dependent on



contact, feeling comes to be; dependent on feeling, craving comes to be; dependent on craving, clinging comes to be; dependent on clinging, becoming or karmic activities come to be; dependent on karmic activities, birth comes to be; dependent on birth, aging, sickness, death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair come to be; thus arises the whole mass of suffering. This is the middle way.

There is no “person,” no “being,” no “he” and no “she,” only cause and effect. When this exists, that comes to be; with the cessation of this, that ceases. With the cessation of ignorance, karmic formations come to cessation. With the cessation of karmic formations, consciousness comes to cessation, etc. Thus ceases the whole mass of suffering. This is the middle path. This is the right view that can help you to avoid the view of eternalism and of annihilationism.

When a meditator sees the five aggregates, whether materiality, feeling, perception, volitional formations, or consciousness, arising and passing away incessantly, he will not have a stand about “myself.” The view of “myself” will not occur in him. There’s no perplexity and doubt.

He realizes: **“What arises is suffering arising. What ceases is suffering ceasing.”**

This knowledge is independent of others: It does not depend on the Buddha, or on any teacher or a book. It is one’s own practical insight knowledge. This is called **right view**.

I would like to connect what we have just discussed to the *Yamaka Sutta* (SN 22.85). Bhikkhu Yamaka held a



pernicious view, a wrong view. He said that, as he understood the *Dharma* taught by the Blessed One, a bhikkhu whose taints are destroyed is annihilated and perishes with the breakup of the body, and does not exist after death.

His fellow monks tried to correct his wrong view, but in vain. Since nobody could convince Yamaka Bhikkhu, they finally invited Venerable Sariputta to talk to him. Out of compassion, Venerable Sariputta approached him and preached him the three universal characteristics of impermanence, suffering, and non-self of the five aggregates.

Venerable Sariputta asked: “What do you think, friend Yamaka, do you regard form as the Tathagata?”

“No, friend,” replied Bhikkhu Yamaka.

“Do you regard feeling, perception, volitional formations, or consciousness as the Tathagata?”

“No, friend.”

“What do you think, friend Yamaka, do you regard the Tathagata as in form?”

“No, friend.”

“Do you regard the Tathagata as apart from form?”
“No, friend.”

“Do you regard the Tathagata as in feeling? As apart from feeling? As in perception? As apart from perception?”



As in volitional formations? As apart from volitional formations? As in consciousness? As apart from consciousness?"

"No, friend."

"What do you think, friend Yamaka, do you regard form, feeling, perception, volitional formations, and consciousness as the Tathagata?"

"No, friend."

"What do you think, friend Yamaka, do you regard the Tathagata as one who is without form, without feeling, without perception, without volitional formations, without consciousness?"

"No, friend."

"But, friend, when the Tathagata is not apprehended by you as real and actual here in this very life, is it fitting for you to declare: 'As I understand the Dharma taught by the Blessed One, a bhikkhu whose taints are destroyed is annihilated and perishes with the breakup of the body and does not exist after death'?"

"Formerly, friend Sariputta, when I was ignorant, I did hold that pernicious view; but now that I have heard this *Dharma* teaching of the Venerable Sariputta I have abandoned that pernicious view and have made the breakthrough to the Dharma."

"If, friend Yamaka, they were to ask you: 'Friend Yamaka, when a bhikkhu is an *Arahant*, one whose taints



are destroyed, what happens to him with the breakup of the body, after death?'—being asked thus, what would you answer?"

You should try to answer this question yourself before getting the answer from Bhikkhu Yamaka, to see how much you have understood the *Dharma* correctly.

"If they were to ask me this, friend, I would answer thus:

'Friends, form, feeling, perception, volitional formations, and consciousness are impermanent; what is impermanent is suffering; what is suffering ceases and passes away.'"

When an *Arahant* dies, if one says he is annihilated or the self has been destroyed, one has already assumed there was the self beforehand. *Arahant* is a conventional name for the five aggregates; the five aggregates are impermanent, and what is impermanent is suffering. Thus, when an *Arahant* dies, we should conclude that what was suffering has ceased and passed away.

The Buddha said that whatever arises is the arising of suffering; whatever ceases is the cessation of suffering. Suffering exists, but no sufferer can be found. That's the essence of all the teachings of the Buddha. There is no person or being. We say a human being takes rebirth; this is only conventional truth. Who takes rebirth? Suffering takes rebirth. What is *Parinibbāna*-final cessation? It is the cessation of suffering. This is the correct view.

What to contemplate during meditation



We experience insight knowledge step by step. First we discern mind and body, *nāma rūpa*. Although mindfulness of breathing (*Ānāpānasati*) is serenity practice, you can also discern *nāma rūpa* and cause and effect while practicing *Ānāpānasati*. For example, the breath is composed of the four elements, with the wind element as the predominant factor. This is materiality. The mind that knows the in-and-out breath is the consciousness aggregate. The perception perceives the breath; the feeling feels the breath; and the volitional formations act upon the breath.

Here the meditator further examines thus: By what is respiration supported? He realizes, supported by the basis, which is the coarse body. The coarse body is composed of the Four Great Elements and the materiality derived from these. The coarse body is where the mental aggregates of feeling, perception, volition, and consciousness occur.

The meditator examines the mind and the body and sees the causal relationship. He concludes that this mind and this body are bare conditions, and things produced from conditions, and that, besides these, there is neither a living being nor a person.

We discern the same way while practicing the four-elements meditation. While discerning the four elements, you may also investigate the cause of arising of the four elements.

Nothing can arise without a cause. If you investigate the mind, you will see that the very intention of seeing the four elements produces the four elements. For example,



the intention to straighten up the crooked body produces the four elements with the wind element as the predominant factor, which pushes your body to become erect.

Therefore, the mind is the cause and the four elements are the effect.

Without discerning cause and effect, while seeing just the four elements without an entity, you might get frightened and fall prey to doubt like Channa Bhikkhu. You might ask, "If there is no self, who am I sitting here looking at the four elements?" Your mind would get very agitated because of the fear of losing the self.

Once the cause and effect are clearly discerned, one can proceed to contemplate the impermanence of physical and mental phenomena.

Understanding suffering is not as easy as you might assume. You can only see suffering when you clearly and consistently see that phenomena are constantly subject to arising and ceasing. Before seeing this constant arising and passing away, it is very difficult to understand what suffering really means. You may understand suffering in terms of bodily or physical suffering only. This physical suffering is experienced by all human beings, and this type of suffering is not insight knowledge. It is not what the Buddha meant by suffering. The real insight knowledge into suffering comes from seeing repeatedly the arising and passing away of phenomena. At that time, you feel helpless or oppressed because this constant arising and passing away is beyond your control. With this experience, you come to understand the non-self nature of



the mind and body. What is beyond our control, what does not yield to our wishes, is non-self. In the *suttas*, the Buddha constantly said, what is impermanent is suffering. What is suffering cannot be regarded as a self. When one sees impermanence, one sees suffering and non-self. Contemplating impermanence is the entry point to the arising of various kinds of insight knowledge.

I hope that the explanations here help you to establish right view. This right view—which is the forerunner of all wholesomeness—will help you along your spiritual path.

Sadhu, sadhu, sadhu.

Talks given during a Five-Day Meditation Retreat in Malaysia: March 10-14, 2012.



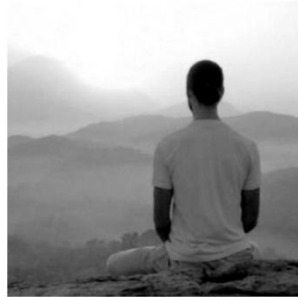


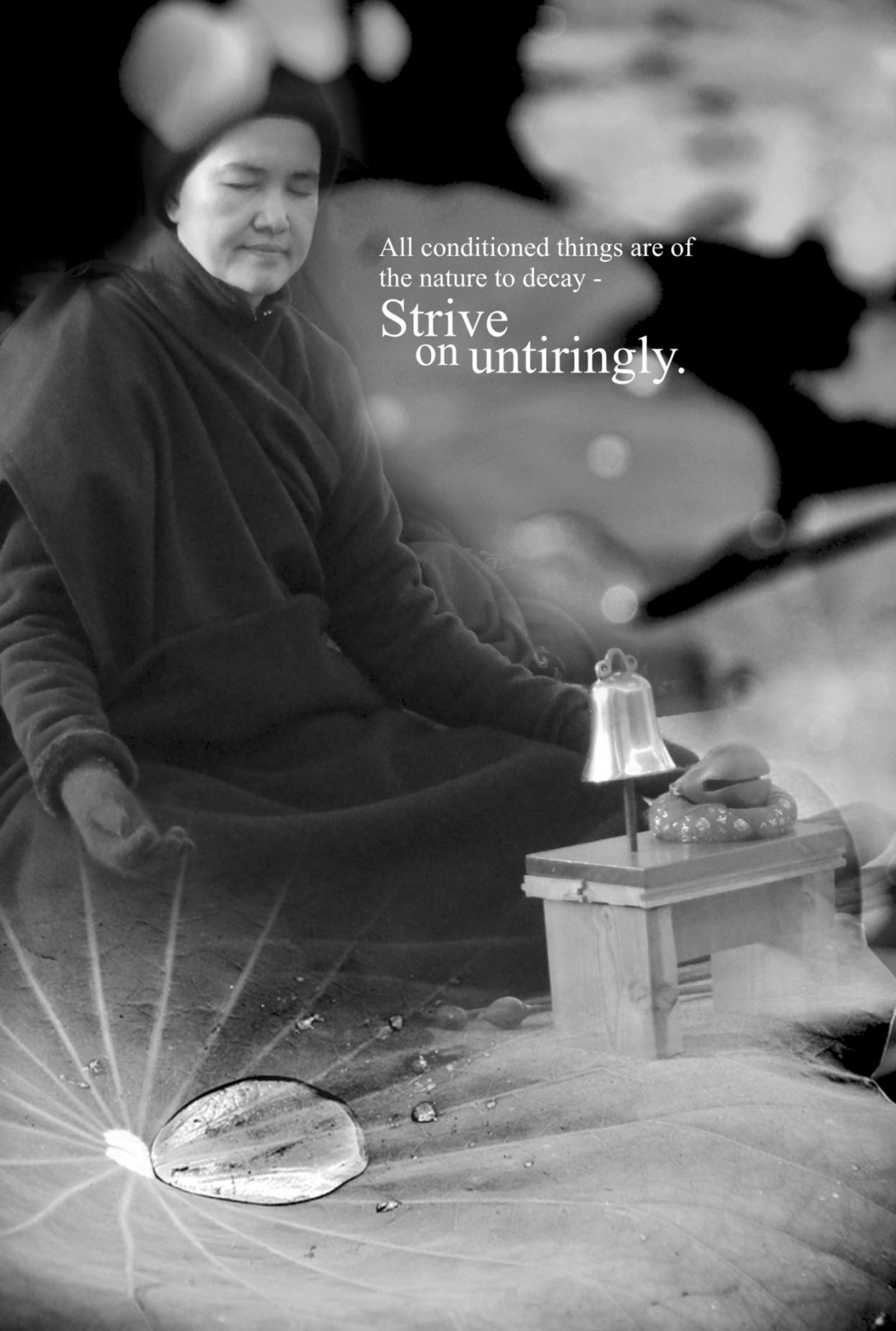
Contemplation of the Mind

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Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Samma-Sambuddhassa (x3)





All conditioned things are of
the nature to decay -

Strive
on untiringly.



*Let the discerning man guard the mind, so difficult to
detect and extremely subtle, seizing whatever it desires.
A guarded mind brings happiness.
—Dhammapada 36—*

The meditation subject called “Contemplation of the Mind” is a profound practice that every meditator needs to learn. During Buddha’s time there was an old man who entered into Buddha’s *sāsana* to become a monk. After ordination, his teacher taught him to learn by heart all of the 227 rules that a monk must follow. He tried very hard, but faced many difficulties due to old age. After he learned all 227 rules, another teacher taught him *Abhidhamma*, which is even more complicated—89 types



of consciousness, 52 mental factors, and 28 kinds of matter.

In the beginning, he put forth energy to try to learn all this, but soon realized that owing to his age, it was just too much. He could not handle it, and eventually he became very depressed and decided to disrobe. Having read his mind, Buddha came to him and said, “I know it’s very difficult for you as an old person to learn all these things, but can you learn just one thing?” The old man was so happy, and replied, “Only one, of course I can.” Then the Buddha told him: “Contemplate your mind.”

If you feel like the old man, considering the *Dhamma* to be too complicated to learn, then learn just this one thing—Contemplation of Mind. Buddha first taught this practice in the sutta on the “Four Foundations of Mindfulness” (MN 10):

“And how, bhikkhus, does a bhikkhu abide contemplating mind as mind? Here a bhikkhu understands mind affected by lust as mind affected by lust. He understands mind unaffected by lust as mind unaffected by lust. He understands mind affected by hate as mind affected by hate, and mind unaffected by hate as mind unaffected by hate. He understands mind affected by delusion as mind affected by delusion, and mind unaffected by delusion as mind unaffected by delusion. He understands contracted mind as contracted mind, and distracted mind as distracted mind. He understands concentrated mind as concentrated mind, and unconcentrated mind as unconcentrated mind.”

These instructions given by the Buddha are so brief and concise that they are almost beyond our



comprehension. Such brief instructions were intended for especially intelligent listeners such as the Kuru people, to whom Buddha taught this discourse, and may cause the rest of us to wonder how one is to carry them out.

Let's take one of the states of mind and explore the meaning. What did Buddha intend when he said "*mind affected by hate as mind affected by hate*"?

All of us have ill-will, or hate. When hate arises in us, instead of understanding that hate is a state of mind—or "*a mind affected by hate as a mind affected by hate*"—at that moment, we grasp at the hate as "*my*" hate. I am angry. Anger is "*I*," anger is "*mine*," anger is "*myself*." Carried away by our hate because of our grasping to and identification with the hate, we can't understand that it is a fleeting state of mind. We don't see "*a mind affected by hate as a mind affected by hate*."

Buddha said, "*Sabbe sankhara anicca* [all formations are impermanent]," including the mind and the body and all the mental factors such as aversion, lust, delusion—everything except *Nibbāna*. So anger, ill-will and hate are also impermanent; subject to change, subject to destruction. However, because of our grasping at the hate as "*I*," "*mine*," "*myself*," we can't see the change. Our grasping interrupts our perceiving these phenomena as they really are. Instead, we perceive these states as interrupting us, and when we regard our hate as self, we indeed do "freeze" or "pause" the hate. Its nature of arising and passing away is interfered with or interrupted. As a result, that hate seems lasting and "real" owing to our holding onto and engagement with it.



When we see hate as permanent and as a self, the ill-will never leaves the bottom of the heart. We keep our ill-will by identifying with it as “I,” as “mine,” and as a result we end up suffering from aversion, owing to our identification with and grasping at the hate. When we try to hold a fireball, the fireball burns us. How can we prevent ourselves from being burned? Throw it away, right? Let go of it. Everybody knows the answer, but when it comes to a real situation, when anger really arises in us, most people choose to hold on rather than throw it away. Because of our grasping at the anger— “I’m angry,” “my anger”—we are burned repeatedly, and the anger remains dormant in the heart. We may be burnt 100 times by the fire of hate, and still we do not learn from the bitter lesson. This is because we lack the skillful means to handle it.

How do we throw the fireball away in order not to be burnt? The remedy is to arouse mindfulness and mentally note “*the mind affected by hate as a mind affected by hate,*” repeatedly—maybe 100 times. Learn this, key-in this way of noting on your internal computer: “Mind affected by hate as mind affected by hate; hate is not ‘I,’ ‘mine,’ or ‘myself.’”

When one understands “*a mind affected by hate as a mind affected by hate,*” one knows that hate is just a mental state. It’s just a mental factor arising at this moment. If one doesn’t identify with or grasp onto it as “my hate” or as “I,” “myself,” the hate will pass away very fast because all formations are subject to change. The hate is not going to last long. This is the nature of all formations. If the nature of the rising and falling of hate is there but, owing to our firm grasping, we do not want to



let go of it, how can hate disappear? Some people grasp the hate or bear the grudge for 20 years, 30 years, or even into the next lifetime. That hate is dormant in the mental stream life after life. In the next life, when you see the enemy again, your memory will flash back, and the anger will arise again. There is no end to it, is there?

As a *Dhamma* practitioner, it is very unwise to carry the burden of grudge around, because by doing so, you make yourself unhappy first. When hate arises, be mindful that hate has arisen and remember “*mind affected by hate as mind affected by hate.*” Repeated mindfulness makes the wisdom understand that hate is just a mental factor, that all mental factors are impermanent and non-self. Having seen and known this, you can let go of the grasping. Once you let go of that clinging, you are immediately freed from the burning sensation caused by anger.

In the same way, “*He understands mind affected by lust as mind affected by lust.*” Sometimes, the mind is overwhelmed, beset by lust for desirable objects. If mindfulness does not recognize that the mind is affected by lust, identity-view will spring up and grasp the lust as “*I,*” “*mine,*” or “*myself.*” In order to satiate the lust, one has to act either verbally or physically to satisfy the intense craving the lust has caused. Thus, unskillful action is performed. Once unskillful action is performed, it leaves behind karmic energy, and when this karmic energy ripens, the result follows one like the shadow that never departs. Therefore, you must know how to contemplate the mind to protect yourself from performing unskillful actions and from harming others.



Mind is the forerunner. Both body and speech listen to the mind. Without volition, the body can't act. In order to eradicate all defilements of the mind, we must contemplate the mind. If you know how to contemplate just this one thing, it's enough for your practice. In fact, by learning just this one thing, the old man attained *Arahantship*.

However, this is one of the most difficult things to learn because the mind changes so quickly. In the round of rebirths, although we cast off our body life after life, the mental stream continues to roam, all the while mistakenly identifying our mind and all our mental factors as “*I*” with identity-view, and as “*mine*” with craving. This grasping of mind has been very deeply rooted in our mental stream, so it's not easy to give up. It is easier to contemplate the body than it is to contemplate the mind.

The Buddha continued, saying, “*He understands mind affected by delusion as mind affected by delusion, and mind unaffected by delusion as mind unaffected by delusion.*” Sometimes, because of delusion, we perform unskillful actions of speech and mind. When this happens, instead of blaming ourselves, we must see “*mind affected by delusion as mind affected by delusion.*” Delusion is also a mental factor, not a self.

Next, “*He understands contracted mind as contracted mind.*” Contracted mind refers to sloth and torpor. When this arises, the mind becomes drowsy. I think only a few of you see drowsiness as merely a mental state, when sloth and torpor arise. Most of us will immediately identify sloth and torpor as “*I*” and say “*I am drowsy, I am drowsy.*” Try



to look at drowsiness directly when it arises, like looking at a stranger. This is a very effective way to do away with drowsiness, but you must begin at the very moment you feel drowsy, not after it becomes heavy. Just be aware of “*contracted mind*,” don’t struggle to get rid of it at first. Instead, look at it face-to-face, and the mind will immediately become clear. This way of looking at the contracted state of mind also frees the mind from identity-view. You just know at this moment, “*Mind affected by drowsiness as mind affected by drowsiness*.” Drowsiness is not “*mine*,” not “*I*,” not “*myself*.”

Then, “*He understands distracted mind as distracted mind*.” Having overcome the contracted mind, one is harassed by another hindrance—a distracted mind. When the mind begins to be distracted by thinking about the past or future, be mindful, be aware of the distraction. Rather than indulging the wandering mind, know it as a mental state of restlessness, and that the distracted mind is not “*I*,” not “*mine*,” not “*myself*.” Contemplate distracted mind as distracted mind. If this does not work, take a deep breath, pause, until you feel the need to breathe out, then breathe out slowly. Visualize yourself blowing out all distractions. Repeat the process several times.

“*He understands concentrated mind as concentrated mind*.” Now, you’ve been practicing concentration for many days. I am very glad that many of you have developed good concentration. However, I would like to remind you that developing concentration is for *seeing things as they really are*, not for grasping the concentrated mind itself. Some of you feel very delighted when concentration is very good and immediately grasp onto



concentration as "*mine*." People say, "*my*" concentration is very good, or they identify concentration with "*I*." This happens automatically because we habitually identify everything as "*I*", "*mine*" or "*myself*."

Without self-identifying, we almost don't know how to live in this world. It is this self-cherishing attitude that keeps life going. So, when concentration is well-developed, understand "*concentrated mind as concentrated mind*," With this understanding, you will neither be conceited, thinking your concentration is better than anyone else here, nor be in competition with another. If you are, when concentration falls away, you will probably be disappointed. When you understand "*concentrated mind as concentrated mind*," you free yourself from grasping onto the concentration as self. Concentration goes up and down, and is not permanent. You've experienced this for yourself.

Next, "*He understands unconcentrated mind as unconcentrated mind*." Sometimes, after the best sitting, concentration suddenly drops to the worst, and the mind becomes unconcentrated. If you can contemplate "*unconcentrated mind as unconcentrated mind*," you will not be disappointed. If concentration were self, you could have good concentration at every sitting. It is precisely because concentration is not-self that it fluctuates. When the conditions are there, concentration develops. When the conditions are not there, concentration cannot develop. Just see concentrated mind and unconcentrated mind as conditioned phenomena and know that what is conditioned is beyond your control.



At times during meditation your mind will be beset by remorse, when the sluggish mind forgets to contemplate "*a mind affected by remorse as a mind affected by remorse.*" Instead, you keep on thinking about the wrong deeds you have performed. Indulging in thought makes the thought become real, and you end up feeling sorry. This is because you do not contemplate a mind affected by remorse as a mind affected by remorse. You identify, you grasp, you cling to this remorse as "*I,*" "*mine,*" or "*myself*" and suffer accordingly. Though you're sitting there very quietly, your mind is agitated and restless. So, it's very important to learn how to contemplate each distinct state of mind.

Some people have been meditating 10 years, or 20 years, and yet they still do not know how to contemplate their mind. What a loss! If you think you have been practicing for 10 to 20 years and yet the "ego" is still big, ask yourself: "*What is wrong with my practice?*" It is possible that it's because you fail to see mind as mind, instead identifying every mind state—happiness, concentration, restlessness, sorrow, hate, lust, etc.—as "*I,*" "*mine,*" or "*myself.*"

Buddha gave only a few states of mind in this Sutta—*mind affected by lust as mind affected by lust, and mind unaffected by lust as mind unaffected by lust; mind affected by hate as mind affected by hate, and mind unaffected by hate as mind unaffected by hate; mind affected by delusion as mind affected by delusion, and mind unaffected by delusion as mind unaffected by delusion; contracted mind as contracted mind, and distracted mind as distracted mind; concentrated mind as concentrated mind,*



and unconcentrated mind as unconcentrated mind. You can extend your knowledge and contemplate other states of mind—mind affected by jealousy as mind affected by jealousy; loving mind as loving mind; happy mind as happy mind. Sometimes while radiating metta you feel very good, happy, and peaceful. This is the benefit of practicing metta meditation. However, it will be good if you can also contemplate “*happy mind as happy mind*” so as not to identify the happiness as “*I,*” “*mine,*” or “*myself.*” Metta is also a mental factor.

I can share with you the whole night how to contemplate the mind, but it is more essential that you put it into practice. Then, gradually, you will become proficient.

After explaining the different states of mind, Buddha continued to explain the way of insight. He said: “*In this way he abides contemplating mind as mind internally, or he abides contemplating mind as mind externally.*” Nowadays, contemplation of mind externally is largely ignored, even though it is very important. What do we mean by contemplating the mind externally? Let’s say somebody shouts at you or harasses you. You become offended and are skillful enough to contemplate your state of mind as “*mind affected by hate.*” However, if by contemplating internally you cannot let go of the suffering caused by other people, then move on to contemplate the external mind—your enemy’s angry state of mind—as the “*mind affected by hate as mind affected by hate*” repeatedly until you lose the perception of self. By not seeing a person, a being, he, or she, you soon let go of your own aversion. Seeing another person as a permanent self allows anger to



find a foothold in you. When seeing no person, but only “*a mind affected by anger as a mind affected by anger,*” equanimity will remain. Therefore, it’s very important to contemplate externally for your own happiness and to develop wisdom.

When we contemplate mind both internally and externally, we come to understand that if our own minds are frequently affected by greed, anger, and delusion, how can we expect others to be free from all these corruptions of mind? We become more accepting, forgiving, and able to embrace another’s shortcomings.

Another purpose for contemplating externally is to remove attachment to our beloved ones. We take their mental states as objects of our contemplation externally. Attachment causes suffering. Seeing others as the manifestation of different states of mind only, not as persons, we lessen our strong attachment to them.

Buddha further said: “*Or else he abides contemplating in mind its arising factors, or he abides contemplating in mind its vanishing factors, or he abides contemplating in mind both its arising and vanishing factors.*” This refers to contemplation of Dependent Origination and insight into rising and falling. Having seen mind as mind, one further investigates the cause of the arising mind state. For example, having contemplated a “*mind affected by lust as a mind affected by lust*” you investigate what causes lust to arise. It could be due to external impingement of sense-objects to sense-bases, such as when a charming girl coming into the range of sight of a man causes the latent tendency of lust to arise.



The visible object of a charming girl is the *cause*, the arising of the lustful mind is the *effect*. Or, abusive words uttered by another contacts the ear-base and triggers the latent tendency of hate to arise. The abusive words are the *cause*, the arising of a hateful mind is the *effect*.

The formula of Dependent Origination says, "When this exists, that comes to be. With the cessation of this, that ceases." Discerning Dependent Origination is an important insight knowledge, which answers the questions: "Who am I? Was I in the past? Was I not in the past? Shall I be in the future? Shall I not be in the future?" By contemplating cause and effect, the causal relationship becomes evident and the non-self nature of mind unfolds. When the cause vanishes—for example, when the charming girl fades from sight—then the effect, the lustful mind, will also cease. Or, when the abusive words stop impinging the ear-base, the hateful mind comes to cessation. However, this is just momentary cessation, as the latent tendencies of lust and hate become dormant.

At this point, one also sees the arising and passing away of conditional phenomena. When a person does not see that a mind affected by lust is also impermanent and subject to destruction, the lustful mind will persist to the extent that one is enslaved by that sensual urge. The mind and body become tormented and burned by the fire of lust. Unable to resist that sensual urge, one gives in to unskillful action to satiate that lust. The fulfillment of the lust, although it satisfies the mind, makes the mind even more lustful. We must contemplate the impermanence of any unskillful mental state in order to sever its proliferation. When perception of impermanence is not



given attention, the phenomena, in this case the lustful mind, is concealed by continuity. But when one contemplates impermanence, the continuity of the unskillful mental state is interrupted.

Without experiencing the knowledge of arising and passing away, the realization of *Nibbāna* is not possible. This knowledge is the gate to liberation. When there is arising of any mental state, the characteristic of its generation is arising, the characteristic of its change is passing away. The contemplation of arising and passing away is knowledge. This is seeing the arising and passing away of mind, from moment to moment.

The Buddha continued by saying, "*Or else mindfulness that 'there is mind' is simply established in him to the extent necessary for bare knowledge and repeated mindfulness.*" This statement is very important. When mindfulness is repeatedly established in knowing the mind, then the knowledge arises, "There is mind only, mind is neither 'I' nor 'myself.'" One's mindfulness is so keen that "there is mind" is simply established to the extent necessary for bare knowledge. Repeated mindfulness is needed here. One moment of mindfulness is not enough. Although sometimes you may be mindful of your mind as "mind affected by lust," you still cling to lust as "*my lust*" owing to weak mindfulness. Similarly, you may mentally note, "*mind affected by hate as a mind affected by hate*" when your mind is beset by hate. However, you still cling to hate as "*my hate.*" This is superficial mindfulness. Mindfulness has the characteristic of penetrating the object rather than floating away. When the mindfulness sinks into the object (mind), it gives rise



to insight. With insight, one knows that whatever the state of mind—a lustful mind, a hateful mind, a deluded mind, etc.—it is not a person, not "I" not "*myself*." This is what the Buddha meant when he said, "*Or else mindfulness that 'there is mind' is simply established in him to the extent necessary for bare knowledge and repeated mindfulness.*"

"And he abides independent, not clinging to anything in the world." The world usually refers to the five aggregates of clinging. Having seen mind as mind, not a being; having investigated mind's arising and vanishing factors; having understood the impermanence of mind from moment to moment—one doesn't cling to one's own mind or to other people's minds with identity-view and craving. Without clinging, one is not agitated. Thus, "*He abides independent, not clinging to anything in the world. That is how a bhikkhu abides, contemplating mind as mind.*"

Perception of non-self thus accrued through contemplation of the mind is crucial for those who want to develop the *Bodhisatta* path—awakening others as well as oneself. When the mind is rid of a self-cherishing attitude, the power to assist others develops to the fullest, and working for the benefit and welfare of others is possible.

ATTITUDE OF THE MIND

While contemplating the mind, keep the mind in the middle. Watch different mental states in a dispassionate way, without getting involved. Let everything come and go without reacting to it. See whatever arises as foreign, as empty or devoid of self.



We can take pain as an example to contemplate the mind. While watching the physical pain that arises during sitting, instead of looking at the pain, look at the mind. What is your reaction to the pain? If there is aversion, then contemplate aversion as *“mind affected by hate as mind affected by hate.”* See this state of mind again and again until you reach the point where you can clearly see that “hate does not belong to me, it is not myself.” The pain is your great teacher if you know how to contemplate skillfully. Don’t suffer the pain for nothing. Without mindfulness of the mind, some may develop aversion to the physical pain and yet be unaware of the hateful mind. If, when looking at the pain, you remain equanimous, then contemplate *“an equanimous mind as equanimous mind.”* See whatever reaction you have toward pain, and contemplate that state of mind as it really is, without getting involved. When you practice in this way, the pain will not bother you anymore. And while you are observing the mind’s reaction toward pain, regard yourself as a third party observing other people’s pain. Don’t think the pain is yours. If you think the pain is yours, then you can’t bear it. Don’t get caught in identity-view.

In an intensive retreat, different emotions, such as anger, greed, joy, fear, remorse, and depression may spring up. Recognize them. Let them be what they are, merely impersonal mental events. Look upon all mental states, all emotions, dispassionately. See whatever arises as conditional, as a third party, as empty or devoid of self. In this way, one frees oneself from entanglement. From a psychological point of view, this way of looking at things allows one to step back. One separates emotionally and is thereby relieved of the worry and fear that, in truth, does



not belong to one. In reality, physical and mental phenomena momentarily arise, perform a function, and naturally fall away. This is the nature of all emotions—arising and passing away, repeatedly. You will succeed if you just look at them without reacting, bearing the perception of impermanence in mind.

So this is the way to contemplate the mind. If you are proficient in this skill, life becomes happy.

Shared in January 2013, at an 8-day retreat, Bodhi Monastery, NJ, USA.





Q & A

Q: I am the psychologist in USA with mental illness who is seeking to meditate as a way of calming down my nervous system so I don't have to go back on medication. I know you help those who have mental problem.

Since I left your retreat on 2013 May, I've been meditating mindfulness of breathing for 2 hours in the morning for 200 days. It is very difficult for me, but one thing that keeps me going is remembering what you said to me - to think of your fearlessness when I'm meditating. I have been sleeping better since meditating, and that's very important.

Do you still experience some happiness and peace in your life? I'm grateful if you do. I need to know there are people in the world who experience some freedom from suffering. That gives me hope. And I remember your "fearlessness"—what a great gift to be born with.

Thanks for staying in touch. It means a lot to me.

**Sayalay Susila (SS):**

I was inspired by your persistency— sitting 2 hours a day despite the difficulty you have undergone.

I would like to recommend you to try loving kindness meditation. It will give you happiness, concentration and sound sleep. Please go to my website, www.sayalaysusila.net and listen all my talks regarding metta or loving kindness meditation, including ebook, and try to follow the instruction accordingly. You can break 2 hours to 2 sessions, each session one hour.

In your daily life, based on the concentration thus accumulated from your formal sitting, you can be more mindful of your thought and feeling. Listening to inspired talks is equally important to gain understanding and happiness in life.

My fearlessness comes from thinking less about myself, but more on others. Whenever my mind thinks of the benefits of others rather than my own benefits, I experience a type of fearlessness based on “no one to cling to” temporary.

I do not help people with mental problem, but whenever I heard people suffers from mental illness, my heart is greatly moved. I have boundless compassion for them, because I think they are seeing the illusion and they keep on reacting to the illusion seen, thinking they are real.

The mental problem comes from false thought which is



projection of scattered and deluded mind. It is mind made. Try to be more aware (more mindful) of the mental pictures that pop up randomly, and try to regard them as unreal, without reacting to them. Cultivate more mindfulness in your daily life, this certainly helps to slow down your reaction toward the mental illusion.

I am a normal person, still I regard many of my thoughts are falsely created, and with mindfulness I react less.

I share with you my writing below:

Do Not Trust Your Mind

If we are aware enough of what is happening in our minds, we probably will notice that our minds are constantly in a fight between evil and good (demon and angel). Most of the time, the evil states of mind—such as craving, anger, jealousy, restlessness, pride, covetousness, bossiness, and defensiveness—take the upper hand over the good states because the untrained mind is still weak.

Without clear insight, we delusively think that the evil states of mind are real, and act and speak accordingly. As a result, suffering follows us "*like the wheel that follows the foot of the ox,*" as said in the opening of the Dhammapada.



If we see through our minds, we realize our minds are creating their own stories aimlessly. When the mind thinks of something good—maybe a past sweet memory or a future hope—it immediately becomes delighted and seizes the episode as real and stable. On the other hand, if the mind thinks of something bad, it becomes dejected, depressed, and stressed—and it seizes that episode as real and stable, too.

Thus, the mind is constantly reacting to its created false thoughts, like a madman. There is no inner peace, only turbulence. Having seen through the way in which the mind does its magic, we can become more aware of the mind and guard against being fooled again.

With persistent effort to develop mindfulness and clear comprehension, the mind reacts less. When our wisdom becomes mature and can see through all the mental states as insubstantial—as dew on a sloping lotus, as a dream, as a shadow, as bubbles—we will have reached the deathless.

Oh, the king of death, soon you will find me not.



My boundless love for you.

(Continuation of a dialogue between Sayalay Susila and the psychologist from USA, about overcoming worry and doubt)

Q: Meditation Student (MS): I'm up to day 29 of meditating two hours, first thing in the morning. I don't know how I'm doing it, but it is definitely calming me down. You told me not to write unless I'm beset with defilements. The most significant defilement I am beset with is the defilement of doubt. Even though I've meditated for 28 days, and don't find it "impossibly" difficult (it's definitely the most difficult thing I do), I constantly fear I won't be able to do it.

SS: You are worrying about what has not yet happened. I regard worry as an illusion because it is sometimes that has not yet happened and may not happen. Why drain your energy worrying? When worry arises, recognize it and immediately divert your attention to the breath so that your mind does not indulge in worrying. Or try to divert your attention to the happy things. Indulging in worry makes the worry persistent. When you are worrying about what has not yet happened, you are not living in the present moment—this will make you unhappy.



Q: Self-doubt with regard to my ability to do difficult things has plagued every area of my life. My whole life, I would have given anything to just let go and trust myself. I don't have that much more of this lifetime left. I would love to live it with some peace and joy and actually be in the present moment. I'm totally willing to put in the effort.

SS: If you want to live in the present moment, you must learn to be aware of arising thoughts, especially worry and doubt. When self-doubt with regard to your ability arises in your mind, recognize it. Mentally note it as impermanent, impermanent, impermanentmany times. Also, see doubt as a mental phenomenon, not as a self. Doubt is unreal; it becomes real only when you indulge in it, and when you grasp it as “myself” and “mine”. Due to grasping it as “myself”, the mind becomes reactive and the defilement proliferates. If you react with the same pattern all the time, it will become second-nature. Once it becomes second-nature, it will be very difficult to change.

Q: But like everything else, I don't trust the progress I make. I only trust bad things. I'm so afraid of losing the good. I know it will because it's impermanent, but I seem to think that suffering is permanent.

SS: I can see the tendencies or pattern in your thinking. You think negatively! When you only think negatively, you become what you think. You must learn to change the way you think—only then can you change your life. Whenever your mind thinks negatively, aware of it with mindfulness, and quickly



transform the negative thought with positive one. I believe you can do it. You endow with persistency as you can sit two hours continuously in the morning. Do not let your happiness pass by thinking negatively. You think suffering is permanent because you are grasping suffering as “myself”. Just regard suffering as suffering, not as a self.

Q: I think about your courage and fearlessness and that helps.

SS: Then you can think more about my courage and fearlessness. My courage comes from not worrying about what has not yet happened, so to speak.

Q: If you have any other suggestions, such as varying the concentration practice with a type of meditation that would help with doubt, please let me know. Apart from concentration, please practice mindfulness and wisdom, too. Be aware of doubt when it arises, then either ignore it (don't indulge in it—if you indulge in it, you make it real) OR contemplate it as impermanent, and as not myself. (For detailed practice, please go to my website and read “Moment to Moment Practice”.)



Q: I feel the retreat has changed my inner life, and my husband agrees...

SS: So, you can do it, right? This should be enough to generate confidence in yourself and in the Dhamma.

Q: ...and of course, I doubt it can last (I mean, the meditating two hours a day). So that's why I'm writing. I need help with this delusion....with the hindrance of doubt.

SS: Good knowledge of the Buddha's teaching helps to dispel doubt. It also gives rise to joy. You need more joy in your life. If you have faith in my teaching, go to my website and listen to my talks or read more inspiring suttas. Doing this will definitely give you happiness and confidence. Do not worry if you cannot sit two hours a day. You can sit twice a day, one hour per session.

May you be happy and free from the illusion of worry and doubt.

The End



Q: Who is trying to be aware of the mind?

A: Your question is not properly formulated. This is because when you ask “who,” you already assume there is an abiding self.

The mind is trying to be aware of the mind. The mind is not a self. We always claim or identify the mind as self, but “self ” is only a conventional truth. What actually exists is the ongoing process of cognition whenever there is contact from the senses. The mind has the characteristic of awareness of an object. And unfortunately, this characteristic of awareness has been misapprehended as self.

So, “no one” is aware of the mind—there is only a succession of mind moments, each aware of the preceding mind moment. When the mind experiences something, that experience is passed on to the next moment, from moment to moment.

And do not forget that the mind arises and passes away at every moment. This is the nature of mind. How can we proclaim something that arises and ceases as a permanent self? Only an ignorant person identifies the mind as a self.

Q: What is the purpose of chanting in Pali? What is the advantage or disadvantage of chanting?



A: Asian people like to chant in Pali simply because Pali is the original language spoken by the Buddha. Most Malaysians are good in many languages—English, Chinese, Malay, Indian—so it is not difficult for them to learn another language [laughter]. However, the Buddha also urged us to use the local language, so there is no problem if you prefer to chant in English, rather than learn another language. What is important is that you understand the meaning conveyed. If you chant in Pali without understanding the meaning of the words, you will not bear the fruit of it—although the devas may like it and be benefited. In short, as long as you understand the meaning, chanting in Pali or chanting in English does not make much difference.

Theravadan monks chant in Pali so that when monastics from Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Burma meet together in any ceremony, they can chant in the same language—Pali.

The advantage of chanting is to remind you of the teachings of the Buddha. It also serves as protection for yourself. Some of the paritta chanting can heal sickness. For example, Maha Kassapa was healed from an illness when the Buddha chanted the Bojjhanga Sutta.

Many years ago, my teacher was greatly ill. None of the doctors could heal him. Finally, a senior monk from Sri Lanka flew over and frequently chanted the paritta for him. As time passed, my teacher recovered from his sickness. There is no disadvantage to chanting.



Q: Why can devas hear when we chant in Pali? Why can't we hear them when they chant in Pali?

A: Devas can hear when we chant in Pali because they are endowed with divine ears due to their previous kamma. If we had divine ears, we would be able to hear them chanting, too. However, we are born lower than devas, who are much more supreme than human beings. Our previous kamma was not powerful enough to produce divine ears. If you want to hear the devas chanting, you can develop divine ears through concentration practice.

Q: How do I keep my eyes from looking here and there during walking meditation?

A: Cast your eyes down and look about four feet in front of you. As long as you keep one meditation subject in mind, your eyes will naturally refrain from looking here and there. You also can ask yourself what your purpose is in coming to this retreat. The Dhamma is for one who is serious and diligent, not for one who is careless and lazy. Those who delight in the Dhamma will reap the fruits of the Dhamma.

Q: When I sit properly, my leg aches. How do I meditate in such a situation?

A: To completely avoid pain is not possible. When you meditate, three "faithful friends" will follow you forever—pain, sleepiness, and restlessness. As long



as you have a body, you will have bodily pain. The bodily pain is not manifested in your daily life because you keep on changing posture. Now, with accumulated concentration and not changing posture often, you start to see the true nature of the body—*dukkha* inherent in the body.

The Buddha said in the *Samyutta Nikaya*, “*Anyone who says his or her body is healthy, even for a moment, is none other than a fool.*” Even the Buddha could not avoid having bodily pain. But the Buddha had no mental pain.

You may feel disappointed when you have physical pain. Actually, all yogis feel the pain as you feel, but some may have more patience and courage to bear with it. The pain associated with this body is a result of our past karma. So avoiding physical pain is not possible. You must learn to accept it with equanimity and understanding. When your mind becomes concentrated, the pain will not disturb you anymore.

This morning, I shared with you one way to deal with pain—instead of seeing pain as “my pain,” try to investigate which elements cause the pain. Maybe hardness is excessive, which is earth element, or heat is excessive, which is fire element, or both hardness and heat together, and so on. If you investigate carefully, you may become interested to see which elements are causing the pain, and gradually you will forget the pain.

Or, if you cannot bear the pain, you can change your posture. Try sitting with your two legs flat on the floor rather than cross-legged. You may also sit in a chair. Some



people think sitting in a chair is for old people. I don't think so. Many Americans attain good concentration by sitting in a chair. Therefore, sitting in a chair is not a hindrance. So, if you have physical pain or injury, please feel free to sit in a chair. Then your problem will be solved.

Q: Is it possible to obtain arahantship by practicing a concentration method, such as mindfulness of breathing? If yes, why are there so many meditation methods?

A: Before I answer your question, let me ask you a question: During lunch time, if we only offer one tofu dish, can it satisfy everyone? No. This is the same reason why only one method cannot satisfy everyone—because different people have different inclinations. Some say: “I don't like tofu; I like meat” or “ I don't like rice; I like bread.” So one type of food cannot satisfy everyone. Therefore, we offer a variety.

Based upon his wisdom, the Buddha understood that different people had different inclinations. He thus offered the 40 meditation subjects described in *The Path of Purification* to suit different people's temperaments.

Some people have difficulty feeling the air. If you ask this type of person to practice anapanasati, gradually they will end up disappointed. Unable to feel the object—the breath—clearly, how can they practice with gladness? Having lost heart, they will stop short.



For those who are often beset by lust, contemplating the impurity of one's body as well as that of the opposite sex is more suitable for overcoming this shortcoming. In this case, mindfulness of breathing is not suitable for that person.

Some find anapanasati difficult, but they like loving-kindness meditation. When they practice loving-kindness, they feel good and progress well.

Therefore, although practicing anapanasati and gradually discerning the jhana factors one-by-one as they occur can lead one to the attainment of arahantship, it is not suitable for everyone. If I only taught anapanasati, people who are not suited to the method would end up agitated. This is the reason why we offer variety. You can choose the method that is most suitable for you. What is suitable for you is the one that makes you feel comfortable and progress swiftly.

Q: What should I do in this life to make sure that in the next life I am still a Buddhist?

A: I think one of the important factors is to pray [laughter]. Whatever good actions you perform (for example, dana, sila, bhavana), make an aspiration: May the merit I acquire become the supporting factor for me to realize arahantship. Before I attain arahantship, in whatever life that may be, may I become a good Buddhist, meet with good teachers, and practice the Dhamma correctly. When you make an aspiration, your mind will incline toward it.



The Buddha said that to fulfill one's wish there are four factors:

- ◆ **Faith:** Having confidence in Buddha, Dhamma, Sangha.
- ◆ **Morality:** Abstaining from killing, taking what is not given, sexual misconduct, false speech, and intoxicants—the basis for heedlessness.
- ◆ **Generosity:** With a heart devoid of the stain of miserliness, freely generous, open handed, devoted to charity, supporting monks and nuns with requisites.
- ◆ **Wisdom:** The wisdom that discerns arising and ceasing of phenomena.

If you possess these four factors, whatever you wish for can be fulfilled. If you don't have these four factors, just praying is not enough. If praying alone were enough, then Buddhism would be like Christianity—just pray to God and everything can be fulfilled.

Praying just inclines or directs our mind to what we wish. At the same time, we exert effort to practice to fulfill the above four factors, so that we can actualize what we are praying for.

Q: How do I deal with sleepiness?

A: There are many ways to deal with sloth and torpor. Sometimes, you must find out the external cause of the sleepiness. For example, don't meditate immediately



after eating. If you do, you will be overwhelmed by sloth and torpor. The same will occur if you meditate when you are too tired. When sloth and torpor come, here are a few ways to help:

- ◆ Opening your eyes and looking at the light will brighten the mind.
- ◆ Reciting some words of the Buddha and temporarily putting aside the object of meditation will make the mind more alert.
- ◆ Scanning the body up and down will also make the mind more attentive.
- ◆ Pulling on the ears is also extremely effective to energize your brain. There are many points on the ears that connect to the brain.
- ◆ You can also do standing meditation. Being worried about falling down onto the person in front of you will probably keep you awake!

I would also like to share with you my own way of staying awake. It is more difficult, but very effective. The very moment I notice sloth and torpor, I just look at them, and they are gone. However, this method requires alert mindfulness. Most people are unable to be aware of subtle laziness right when it arises. By the time they see it, the laziness has already gained momentum – the body sways and the head nods. At this time, it is too late to apply my method. If your mindfulness is precise and you are clear on what is happening in the mind, the moment you know sloth and torpor, they will disappear.

Q: Sayalay, I just can't meditate. My mind is running so restlessly, jumping here and there like a monkey. That's why I have decided not to meditate—because maybe the



time is not quite right just yet.

A: The Buddha said in Dhammapada 35:

*Wonderful, indeed, it is to subdue the mind,
so difficult to subdue, ever swift,
and seizing whatever it desires.
A tamed mind brings happiness.*

Thus, it is mind's nature to be restless. Learn to accept it. It is precisely for this very reason that one needs a method to calm the mind down and make it more manageable. And that direct method, as prescribed by the all-knowing and compassionate Samma Sambuddha, is meditation. A courageous person will not withdraw when faced with difficulty.

To overcome restlessness, use the counting method if you are practicing mindfulness of the breath. Breathing in, breathing out, one; breathing in, breathing out, two; breathing in, breathing out, three. Count up to five, then start with one again. Practice in this way with persistence and the restlessness will subside gradually.

A better method might be to start with loving kindness meditation. This meditation makes the mind happy. Happiness produces concentration. Reflecting on your own virtue—such as your generosity and morality—will also make the mind happy, thereby calming and stilling your mind in meditation.

I would like to encourage you with an inspiring story in the Dhammapada to show that nothing is impossible.



Pandita was the young son of a rich man in Savatthi. He became a samanera at the age of seven. On the eighth day after becoming a samanera, as he was following Thera Sariputta on alms-round, he saw some farmers channeling water into their fields and asked the thera, "Can water, which has no consciousness, be guided to wherever one wishes?" The thera replied, "Yes, it can be guided to wherever one wishes." As they continued on their way, the samanera next saw some fletchers heating their arrows with fire and straightening them. Further on, he came across some carpenters cutting, sawing, and planing timber to make it into things like cart-wheels. Then he pondered, "If water, which is without consciousness, can be guided to wherever one desires, if a crooked bamboo, which is without consciousness, can be straightened, and if timber, which is without consciousness, can be made into useful things, why should I, having consciousness, be unable to tame my mind and practice tranquility and insight meditation?"

Then and there he asked permission from the thera to return to his own room in the monastery. There, he ardently and diligently practiced meditation, contemplating the body. Sakka and the devas also helped him in his meditation by keeping the monastery and its precincts very quiet and still. Before meal time, Samanera Pandita attained anagami fruition.

At that time, Thera Sariputta was bringing food to the samanera. The Buddha saw with his supernormal powers that Samanera Pandita had attained anagami fruition. He also saw that, if Samanera Pandita continued to practice meditation, he would soon attain arahantship. So the




Buddha decided to stop Sariputta from entering the room where the samanera was. The Buddha went to the door and kept Sariputta engaged by asking him some questions. While the conversation was taking place, the samanera attained arahantship. Thus, the Samanera Pandita attained arahantship on the eighth day after becoming a novice.

The Buddha then spoke in verse as follows:

*Farmers channel the water;
fletchers straighten the arrow;
carpenters work the timber;
the wise tame themselves.*

- Dhammapada 80 -





The book is sponsored by

Ben Zhang

from Beijing, in memory of his late father

&

Sayalay Susilā

in memory of her late mother.

*May all beings share this merit and
attain eternal happiness*

— Nibbāna



SHARING OF MERITS

Through this generosity:

May my spiritual teachers of great virtue, my mother, my father, and relatives, the sun and the moon, and all virtuous leaders of the world, may the highest gods and evil forces, celestial beings, guardian spirits of the earth, and the lord of death, may those who are friendly, indifferent, or hostile, may all beings receive the merits of my sharing. May they soon attain the threefold bliss, and realize the deathless.

Through the goodness that arises from my generosity, and through this act of sharing: May all desires, attachment, and all harmful states of the mind quickly cease. Until I realize Nibbāna, in every kind of birth, may I have an upright mind, with mindfulness and wisdom, austerity and vigor. May the forces of delusion not take hold, nor weaken my resolve. The Buddha is my excellent refuge, The Dhamma is my noble guide, The Sangha is my supreme support.

Through the supreme power of all these: May darkness and delusion be dispelled.

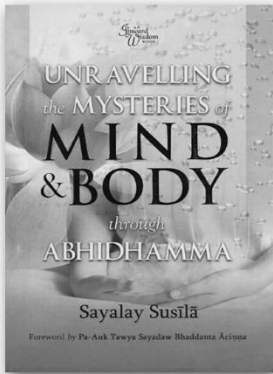
May my departed relatives receive and rejoice in this sharing of merits.
Sadhu, sadhu, sadhu.

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website: www.sayalaysusila.net



Unravelling the Mysteries of Mind and Body through Abhidhamma

by Venerable Sayalay Susilā



This is another great masterpiece of Venerable Sayalay Susilā, published in Jan 2013. For the international reader who is interested in the above title, the book is available at Amazon.com. For Malaysian readers, please send your enquiry to sayalaysusilaretreat@gmail.com, where the book can be obtained by donation. All donations and proceeds will be used to establish Appamāda Viharī Meditation Center.

Review from readers: 5 OUT OF 5 STARS (Amazon.com)

A Masterful Exposition on Abhidhamma & Meditation

— By Eric Bause, June 9, 2013

Sayalay Susila's book presents a survey of the Abhidhamma and its practical application to meditation; it is this unique combination of the two in a clear and concise manner that makes it stand out from other dharma books. Due to this unique approach, I don't know that there is..... another book with which it can be directly compared. I highly recommend this book.

Part One "The Four Truths" goes through the details of Abhidhamma, with sections on consciousness, cognitive processes, karma and its results, mental factors, matter and Nirvana. This section alone will make the book a.....

worthwhile addition to the library of anyone interested in the Theravada Abhidhamma.

Part Two “ The Cycle of Birth and Death” details the Processes of death and rebirth, building on the material on cognitive processes from the previous section, and concludes with section on dependent origination.

Part Three “The Escape” deals with actual meditative practices, with sections on the Noble Eightfold Path, serenity meditation, four element meditation (a practice rarely taught in the west) and insight meditation, all building on the framework put together in the first two parts of the book. If any of this resonates with you, order this book –you’ll be glad you did.

A complicated subject, simplified and readable

— By SassyCat, June 18, 2013

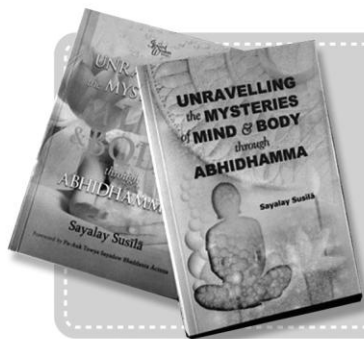
Using her extensive knowledge of a subject often considered complicated and impenetrable, the author draws out the essence of the Abhidhamma, the core teachings of the Buddha, in this important book. Presented in straightforward, easy-to-read language with simple analogies and clear anecdotes, the book is equally suitable for beginning meditators as well as those who have followed the Buddha’s path for many years.

Although easily read, the book is perhaps most valuable as a study manual, a reference that answers many of the detailed questions that naturally arise as one progresses upon the Noble Eightfold Path. Beginners might naturally progress more slowly through the material, while an advanced meditator who has read and studied the Satipatthana Sutta and longed to understand the details behind this and other suttas will certainly appreciate the analytical nature and direct style in which the material is presented

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List of Sayalay Susila's Published Books





UNRAVELLING THE MYSTERIES OF MIND & BODY THROUGH ABHIDHAMMA (ENGLISH)

First Printing: Year 2005;
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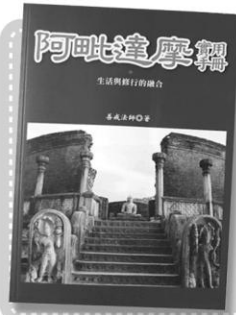
THE NINE ATTRIBUTES OF THE BUDDHA (CHINESE)

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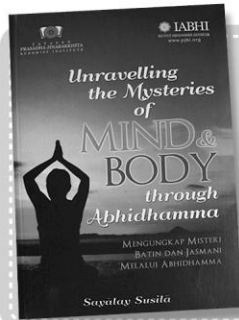
UNRAVELLING THE MYSTERIES OF MIND & BODY THROUGH ABHIDHAMMA (CHINESE)

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**THE HANDBOOK OF ABHIDHAMMA
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**UNRAVELLING THE MYSTERIES OF MIND &
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**DHAMMA ESSENCE SERIES - 1
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**THE PATH TO HAPPINESS
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